TED *and* TONY

BY LILIAN GARIS

TED AND TONY:
TWO GIRLS OF TODAY

" YOU'RE A DARLING GIRL—AND SO IS TED." "I WONDER WHY YOU HAVE BOTH TAKEN BOY'S NAMES?"

Ted and Tony. *Frontispiece* (*Page* 126)

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By

LILIAN GARIS

Author of

"A GIRL CALLED TED," "CLEO'S CONQUEST,"
"JOAN: JUST GIRL," "BARBARA HALE,"
"GLORIA AT BOARDING SCHOOL," ETC.

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A GIRL CALLED TED
TED AND TONY: TWO GIRLS OF TODAY

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Ted and Tony: Two Girls of Today

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TED AND TONY:
TWO GIRLS OF TODAY

CHAPTER I

THAT NOISE

It was a weird noise, a queer noise, an awful noise. And it came from somewhere, but where? Tony pulled her horse up sharply while she listened. Yes, she was driving a horse and the horse was pulling a cart, rather reluctantly it seemed, for the horse was old and the cart looked older, but the girl, Tony, christened Antoinette, but few knew that, well, Tony was young, she looked it, acted it and loved it.

"What on earth is that noise?" she asked Major her horse.

Major shivered his left ear and put his tongue out. He cared nothing for queer noises; what he wanted was his shady corner by the brook, between the apple tree and the hickory nut tree.

"There it goes again. Come on, Maj, we've

got to run down that noise. Get to running."

Major shivered his other ear but did not start the desired running. This girl made him sick. He had been enjoying old age peacefully, if not gracefully, over in the corner of the meadow, until she came. And she dragged the old cart out of the old barn, and look what she had done to it. He tried to turn around to look, but a gentle flick of the willow whip reminded him to move in the other direction and he finally moved.

The interesting noise had now developed into a howl, and it was coming from the wayside stand. The stand was over at a very sunny corner alongside a nice white bungalow, where all the roads met, and now Tony managed to urge Major in that direction.

"Out of the air," the girl mused, pushing her hair back, that didn't stay back a minute. It was black hair, or it looked black, but was really very dark brown, but like Tony's name being Antoinette and nobody knowing it, neither did they know her hair was brown.

"Pull up there, Maj," she ordered. "I'm stopping here."

Glad to stop anywhere Major did.

"Hello!" called out Tony to the front of the stand.

No answer.

"Hello there! Anybody home?" She waited, looking around critically. It was a nice clean stand and the tomatoes were beautifully red.

The noise was easy to classify now. It was a shrieking, howling static, crazy radio. And while she stood there a moment, a head, yes it certainly was a head on a girl's shoulders, came up slowly from under the counter.

"Oh, good morning," said the mouth in the head. "Did I keep you waiting?"

"Oh, no," stammered Tony, looking into a pair of hazel eyes. "I was just coming along——"

"And you heard my circus radio." This girl was nice, she had such a pleasant smile and everything.

"Yes, that was what I wondered about——"

"I'm so glad. You see, I've just started this stand and I've got to draw customers. So I had my radio set up." She was moving toward a sheltered corner and that was where the noise was coming from. Promptly the girl turned a big button and the noise stopped dead.

"Was there something wrong with it?"

"That was a circus, I think. I picked it up from somewhere out at sea."

"A circus out at sea!" Tony laughed.

"That is funny, isn't it?" and the other girl laughed, too. "But it was relayed from some ship. I guess the boys were playing circus. Anyway it made a beautiful noise. I only wish it had lasted a while longer." She looked down the road but saw no prospective customers coming.

"I'm Tony Potter," blurted out the girl with the brown-black hair and lovely dark eyes. "And I live, just now, over in the corner of that field. There's an old farmhouse there."

"Yes, I know the place. Lovely old bushes and things——"

"Exactly, but an *awful* house."

The stand girl laughed a little to make light of the charge against the farmhouse. She had a bright, golden brown head of what could have been beautiful hair, if she would let it grow. But she hadn't, and it was a shiny bob that fitted her head like the latest style in draped-on hats.

"Well, I'm Ted Layton," she proclaimed presently. "You're Tony and I'm Ted. That's funny, isn't it?"

"I've got a long name hard to spell," volunteered Tony. "Antoinette."

"I'm almost as bad with Theodora," chimed in Ted. "But I'm glad to meet a girl with a

nice short name." Her joy at meeting Tony, however, seemed deeper than mere love for short names. This girl must have been lonely.

"Yes, now we're Ted and Tony!" Tony contributed, her own pleasure not hidden either.

"Fine. I'm awfully glad you stopped."

"So am I. But you see, my old horse, Major, is famous for stopping."

"Then I'm going to treat him. May I?"

"Anything green but cucumbers. I've never tried cucumbers on him. Come on over, Maj," Tony coaxed, holding out her hand. "Get acquainted."

In the course of his introduction Major received some parsley (he didn't like that), a lovely tomato that he deliberately knocked out of Ted's hand, and finally, since he had no use for nice fresh vegetables, the girls gathered him some clover and some grass; that is Ted gathered it, and Tony felt obliged to pick up a bunch of weeds just to avoid looking on lazily.

While Major munched, the girls talked. They were chums practically at once, for the girl at the stand, Ted Layton, was just as much in need of a chum as was the girl who drove the crazy old dog cart, Tony Potter.

Ted was down at the little sea shore town for the summer, she explained, and even in this short time, she told Tony plainly, that she was determined to earn some money, and hence the stand.

Tony liked the idea herself, and while she admitted her folks might not like her to go into business, because they would never believe she could do anything like that, still, she imagined they might let her help Ted, as Ted had so urgently needed to be helped, according to her own frank statement.

There were such marvelous possibilities. There was Ted with a stand and a radio. What Ted didn't have in the way of supplies Tony could gather up in the country and fetch in on the cart. She could even deliver them, not to say peddle them, if the need arose, and if someone wanted a head of nice fresh garden cabbage and a bunch of the sweetest young carrots you ever tasted—if some one needed those for sickness, say, and couldn't go to the stand for them, Tony could induce Major to amble along in front of her cart with the needed things in nice clean baskets.

"I can hardly believe I have fallen into such luck," Tony declared as Ted so amiably

agreed. "I had just about made up my mind to spend the summer tantalizing Major. He's pretty good." Major was surely grinning at them, his ears perked up and his tail swishing a fly some distance away. "But a horse is only a horse——"

"I know. I've got a dog at home," Ted informed Tony, "but I wouldn't have a dog, around a stand."

"No. Dogs need a lot of room, like horses," Tony added. "Well, let me buy something——"

But as she turned her attention to Ted's berries and early vegetables, she saw a boy, a queer looking boy with a big, Airedale dog, come shambling up to the stand.

"Dog biscuits," he grunted sourly, and Tony had to turn her head away to keep from laughing.

He had hair that stood up straight in so many places it looked as if it grew up instead of down. No hat, no shoes, just a dirty blouse and khaki knickers. But the dog! He was a thoroughbred and could never belong to that boy.

The girl behind the counter dropped two square boxes down from a high shelf, the boy dropped some change on the counter, took up

the boxes and was off again without ever changing that stupid expression on his stupid face.

"Who is he?" Tony asked as the boy slouched off.

"He's Bumpy, and he carries dog biscuits for the campers over on Rollywood Bend. He's a star, Bumpy is. And the people over on the Bend are stars too," said the girl with the yellowest hair.

"Are they the folks that look like movie makers?"

"Yes, but maybe they only look like them," Ted rejoined. "I don't think I'd like their pictures, if they made any."

"No, they must be sort of freaky. I noticed their outfits first thing. Some of their cars are worse than mine," Tony finished, pointing to the dilapidated box on wheels that poor old Major was trying to stand for. Certainly Tony's rig looked enough like circus stuff to get her mixed up with that radio squealing.

"But people like that, I mean folks who are so different from other people are always interesting," Ted pointed out. "I always expect something wild and woolly to happen over in that colony."

"Why, has anything ever happened over there?"

"Nothing to call the police for," Ted replied gaily. "And your father——"

"My uncle Tom——" Tony corrected.

"Oh, is he your uncle? Well, I was just going to say, he's the handsomest policeman we've got. He looks stunning on that new motor," Ted declared frankly.

"Doesn't he? And I'll tell him you said so——"

"Oh, please don't."

"Why?"

"Sounds so silly."

"Not a bit of it. My Daddy Tom, I call him daddy because I've always been with him," Tony managed to insert, "he's not a bit conceited and a compliment would do him good. I'm sure it would." Tony had already selected some of the prettiest tomatoes, although Ted told her they had come from the South and that the Jerseys would not be in until late July. Also she had set aside a box of raspberries, as she said her Daddy Tom loved those, and for her Aunt Mattie, the other member of her household, Tony had selected a box of raisin cookies; Aunt Mattie never said no to raisin cookies, declared Tony.

"I hope you get a lot of customers; do you keep open evenings?" she asked Ted, who was most carefully putting the perishable things in bags and little paper boxes.

"I'd stay open all night if I thought anyone would come to buy," Ted declared gaily. "There's a car stopping now."

"Good luck!" called back Tony, as she mounted the old cart and gave Major his head. He took it, and Tony along with it, over the dusty road to the queer old farmhouse that looked like a post-card picture beside a silly little brook.

And then, when she attempted to tell her Aunt Mattie about the girl at the wayside stand, her real talent was called into play.

CHAPTER II.

REALLY NEW

THEY had come a long distance, Tony's folks had, to live in New Jersey, all the way from Cape Cod: and they were by no means settled, when the girl, who had always been so much of a tomboy that her loved ones called her Tony, managed to coax the old horse Major to drag her funny looking dog-cart through the little seashore town. It was some days later now, and here was the post-man coming, and he brought her among other pieces of delayed mail, a post-card from Sally Freeman, with a picture of Lake Elizabeth, Cape Cod, and a little message about not forgetting her old friends. As if Tony would.

"But it's lots nicer here, Aunt Mattie; don't you think so?" she asked that lady, after displaying the card.

"Yes, dear, I like it here. Are you going to finish fixing up your room today? You'll have time if you start now."

Tony cast big pleading brown eyes, soft as a puppy's and about as pathetic, at Martha.

She had planned to go over to Ted's again that afternoon to arrange about house cleaning of the stand, and she was simply fascinated with the idea. She had never before known what that kind of play was—like playing house, only lots nicer—and she knew she would get along famously with Ted as a companion. But she certainly should finish fixing her own room. She admitted that.

"Oh, yes, Aunt Mattie. Of course I'm going to finish my room today," Tony answered rather guiltily, for she had been putting that off for days and days. "Shall I hang the scrim curtains when I cut the pasteboard for my scrap basket?"

"You needn't bother with the curtains, dear, I'll attend to them, although this old house doesn't seem to need scrim in the windows with all those vines," Martha replied from the glass doors of the pantry, which were framing her head as a picture might be framed. "I'll be glad when I get all the dishes settled, they have to be handled so carefully," she added thoughtfully.

"Yes indeed they do have to be handled carefully, Aunt Mattie," chirped Tony. "I'll know lots more about handling them, when I've been helping Ted a while with the

soda glasses and frankfurter plates. I wish you would come over with me, and get acquainted with Ted Layton, Aunt Martha," Tony suddenly exclaimed, and when she said Martha instead of Mattie it meant she was saying something of real importance. "You know, she left school and she was just ready to graduate," went on Tony. "But her grandmother or some relative, I think it was her aunt, owns the stand and she was taken so bad with rheumatism she couldn't even stand up. That's why Ted is running it. I think it is noble of her, don't you, Aunt Martha?" This bit of information had been given to Tony by Ted, when she told Tony of her determination to make some money in her own way.

Martha glanced quizzically at the girl just drying the last of the breakfast cups. It was so unusual for her to say anything like that; to say a girl was doing something noble!

"Maybe she likes the business better than she liked school these days," Martha rejoined slyly.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Tony, in what is sometimes called "high dudgeon" for want of a more descriptive term. "She loved school, and she was all ready to graduate," insisted

Ted's champion stoutly. "But somebody had to run the stand, and so she just left school and went right at it."

"And it's lots of fun, isn't it?" teased Martha.

"Oh, lots," agreed Tony quite off guard.

Then they both laughed. Tony dropped her dish-towel on the chair, which was absolutely against Martha's rules, and ran over to pretend she was going to shut Martha right in the glass closet doors, for Martha was making her admit she, too, liked to play at stand keeping.

"I caught you that time," joked Martha. "But it's all right, Tonyetta," she assented happily. "We have inquired all about your new friend Ted, as you call her, and what we hear is all to her credit. Perhaps she'll teach you to be a good little housekeeper. Wouldn't *that* be lovely?" Martha always hoped that Tony would become a domesticated animal some day.

"If we could only keep house the way she keeps the stand, it would, Aunt Mattie," Tony agreed conditionally. "But out doors like that, with lovely shiny autos rolling up, and boys, big boys of course, calling for 'hot dogs'!"

That seemed funny too, and kept up the

laughter, although Martha didn't think she would exactly like *her* brother coming home for lunch, by just shouting "Hot Dogs!" in the kitchen window.

"And, oh say, Aunt Mattie," Tony's changed tone indicated a change of subject, "aren't you glad we have such lovely evergreens in our yard? I never saw such wonderful little trees," she enthused. "Just like all kinds of toy Christmas trees and winter flowers. They must look like post-card pictures when the snow is on them."

"They are really beautiful," Martha agreed with her. "You see, dear, when they built these old houses they planted the trees all around the foundation, just as carefully as they put the shingles on the roof. Tom says all the old houses around here are edged with evergreens, and all the good new ones too."

"Daddy likes the cedar, doesn't he?" Tony ventured.

"Indeed he does; he always did. When he was a little boy I remember mother used to say she always had to comb burdock burrs out of his hair; he was always playing in the hedges."

"Yes?" said Tony hopefully, but Martha continued to polish the glasses and seemed to have fallen into thoughts too deep for words.

Finally Tony spoke again. "Everybody is talking about our handsome state trooper," she said merrily. "And, Aunt Mattie, doesn't he look wonderful in his uniform?"

"I think so."

"And flying along on the motor-cycle," she drew a deep breath of satisfaction, "he is the handsomest man in the whole State troop, I'll bet," Tony concluded, proud as always of her hero.

And while they were in that talkative mood she almost told Martha about Bumpy, the funny boy who bumped into everybody and everything, and did errands for the people who lived in the enclosure among the pines, called Rollywood Bend.

But Tony didn't mention it. She had a feeling that her Aunt Mattie might object to her even noticing a boy like Bumpy, and of course, she didn't really intend to notice him unless he bumped into her.

Instead she talked about Rollywood Bend.

"Did you know, Aunt Mattie," she began, hurrying a little because she was actually determined to finish her room, "that some queer health folks camp over in the pines almost all winter?"

"A good idea," commented Martha. "Folks live indoors too much."

"But these are funny kind of folks. I saw one of their cars the other day," she went on, keenly interested in what she was telling, "and it was the funniest looking thing I ever saw. It had a trailer on it, that Ted says the folks sleep in."

"Yes?"

"Yes." Somehow Tony was getting breathless and Martha peeked at her out of the corner of her eye. "And Ted says," she resumed, "that most all the people on Rollywood Bend are rich."

"Well, dear child," Martha replied to that, "all the folks down here have to be rich or they wouldn't come to Surgo Lake. This is an expensive place."

"Yes, I know." Tony was hesitating. Evidently she was concealing something yet anxious to talk all around it. "But don't you think it awfully queer for a lady to sleep out on the road in one of those trailer things, with no one to protect her but a big dog?" she asked finally.

"No, that's all right. Girl Scouts sleep that way——"

"But there are a lot of them together," Tony interrupted. "This is just one lone lady."

"Who is this lady? And why are you

interested in her?" Martha asked at that.

"Oh," replied Tony, a little flustered, "she came down the other day and stopped at the stand."

"Yes?" That was Martha's way of asking what next.

"Yes. And Ted was busy so I waited on her."

"Yes?"

Tony had never intended to tell all this, not now at any rate. But she just had to answer Martha.

"I didn't really see her, that was the queer part of it," Tony cautiously continued. "She wore such a thick veil and big dark goggles, I couldn't see her face at all. Imagine a veil these days. But she asked for milk and crackers, and the dog was chained to the seat. Really, Aunt Mattie, it sort of gave me the jim-jams to hear a voice and see someone sitting there on that seat all covered up with a face mask."

"A face mask!" Martha repeated.

"Yes, her face really was masked. It——"

"Tonyette," interrupted Martha, a little sharply, "I don't want you peddling things to auto riders, you know. That isn't *your* stand and you can't tell whom you are waiting on."

"Oh, Aunt Mattie, I'm not. That is, I

didn't peddle anything." She was now sorry she had said anything about it, but it was too exciting to keep secret.

"Then what was there about it all that impressed you so strongly?" Martha questioned shrewdly.

"Why, I wasn't impressed," stumbled Tony literally, for she was going toward the stairs with her arms so filled she actually couldn't see her feet, and so she stumbled over a hat box and fell flat!

"Look out!" called her Aunt Mattie too late. For the girl with the armfull of towels and bed linen, had fallen upon the hat box, spilled the clean linen just fresh in from the laundry, smashed the hat box and mixed things up generally.

"Oh, my!" she exclaimed, trying to pick up herself and the linen at the same time. "I'm glad that box was empty. Suppose your new hat had been in it!"

"If it had, Tony-Antoinette, I'm afraid you would have made a lovely pancake of it"; laughed Martha. "Just look at that box."

But trifling as the incident was, Tony welcomed it; it had given her a chance to get away from Martha's questioning. She had not intended telling about the woman in the gypsy wagon auto, but she couldn't seem to

help it, for the occurrence had given her her first taste of real New Jersey adventure, and naturally her mind was filled so with it, it kept spilling out.

She was helping Ted arrange the little paper doilies under the glasses on the shelf over the soda fount, the day before, when it had happened. Bumpy had just been along with a basket for all kinds of stuff, dog-biscuits for dogs, crackers for people, condensed milk, can soup and a whole pound of uncooked frankfurters for himself. Ted, as usual, had been teasing him about his customers over in Rollywood. It seemed he would buy from Ted and sell over again at whatever profit he thought safe to demand, and Ted always plagued him about it.

He had said he wanted extra stuff because "the queen" was coming down from New York that day, and when he had finally got loaded up and was scuffling off, Ted told Tony about the queen.

"She lives in her car, doesn't see anybody hardly, and changes her name whenever she feels like it," Ted explained. "Even her checks have different names signed to them—I guess she's kind of crazy," Ted added indifferently. "But Bumpy won't let you say boo about her," she told further. "He just

thinks she's the only lady in Rollywood, and he calls her the queen because she dresses so fancy—so he says. I never saw her out of the car, and the car she lives in is rigged up like a throne."

Ted was telling all this to Tony when the very chariot they had been talking about rolled up the avenue, and turned the corner toward the stand.

"Oh!" cried out Tony. "Here it comes now —the queen's chariot!"

The car was indeed curiously constructed, or rather fitted up, for in construction it was probably like many other cars. But the whole car was closed, not with curtains but with funny doors with little windows at the top, and when the car stopped at the stand Tony saw that these little side windows had dark curtains tightly drawn.

On the front seat which was outside in limousine style, sat the driver, evidently "the queen" Bumpy had been buying the extra groceries for. And there really was something queenly looking about her. Tony saw that at once, although the day was warm and the lady was wearing a cap with a veil over it, and goggles like the first motor ladies of long ago.

"Masked," was the word that came to Ted's

mind as she stepped up to the car with the things.

"Put them there beside Bilge," the voice said sweetly. "He takes care of everything for me. And he won't hurt you."

"I'm not afraid of dogs," Tony answered promptly, for she always detested the idea of girls being afraid of dogs.

"You are not?" It was uncanny to hear a voice coming from behind all that veiling and stuff. "Then you are brave, and a brave girl is always delightful. Good-bye, my dear; Bilge is waving to you," she called, in voice like a bird's song. Then she started the car, and Tony stood there watching it go.

"Bilge," she repeated. "What a queer name for a dog?"

"That lady is a queer namer," rejoined Ted, indifferently. "Bilge means something about sea-water, doesn't it? I've heard my dad use the funny word," Ted finished.

"I don't know what it means," confessed Tony still absorbed with the whole incident. "But I'll ask *my* daddy. He knows every single thing about the sea."

"Ye-ah," murmured the stand keeper, busy again at arranging the candy boxes.

Tony was still watching the car that was turning, and so it had hardly started off yet.

She noticed some little evergreens sticking out from under the canvas of the trailer, just as if evergreens were not easy to get at Surgo Lake. She asked Ted about the trees, when the car had swung out of sight, but Ted joked about it the way she did about everything.

"Some folks think they have to raise good trees from grape fruit seeds," she had replied. "My Aunt Nannie can raise trees from banana peels——"

"Oh, I suppose some people really do raise the little trees and bring them down to their summer homes," Tony interrupted the joker. "They like them better when they raise them, maybe."

"Yes, but the queen didn't. She doesn't stay long enough in any one place to raise even her voice. Isn't it nice and soft? Her voice, I mean."

So that was that, although other cars had come along later loaded with every sort of thing from brooms to flag poles, so that Tony understood then about the trees. People brought everything portable in their cars, even tying them on the roof of some, and one went by with a full sized wooden packing-case roped on the side, in the most dangerous way anyone could disfigure a car and also take risks in traffic.

"But there's one good thing about the queer folks at Rollywood Bend," Ted told Tony as they talked, "they always pay their bills, and *that's* something."

"Well, I'm not afraid of dogs," was Troy's reply then, "but I watched my hand when I laid the change down on that seat beside that big Airedale. I expected old Tangles to snap my hand off."

"He probably was counting the change and never noticed your pretty little hand," Ted answered. "Even the dogs at Rollywood are wise enough to know their own business and stick awfully close to it."

Tony begged to know more about Bumpy's queen, but Ted insisted no one knew any more, but suggested now that Tony, the detective, was on the scene perhaps she'd have a good chance to find out.

"Why is she all wound up like a mummy?" was Tony's last and most imperative question.

"Ask Bumpy—and *he* won't tell you," was the way Ted answered that.

No wonder Tony was interested. But if she had gone just a few sentences further when talking of this to Martha, that is, if the hat-box tumble hadn't saved her from going a few sentences further, she might have "given away" the real reason for her excitement.

CHAPTER III

THE PIE FIGHT

BUMPY had come back to the stand again that day. He seemed more slouchy and more bumpy at every—well, one couldn't say at every step, for he never stepped; he just shoved along as if he hated to bring one foot up because he feared to bring the other foot down. So he kept them both down, as close to the ground as his crawling motion would permit.

Always taciturn and cross looking, the boy, Tony imagined, had taken a particular dislike to her. He never lost a chance to "make a face at her" or to say something snappy. But she didn't mind that; lots of boys were like that at first, she understood. They seemed to be shy of getting acquainted and so put up that childish sort of defense, just like a baby slaps a person's face, and howls gleefully if the pudgy little finger can possibly get stuck into somebody's eye. And Bumpy was awfully babyish in spite of his size, which Ted

said he got from being warped, because he lived so near the ocean.

Every single time he came up to the stand Tony made some new discovery about him, and this time she was discovering that he had real nice big gray eyes, if his face was all dirty around them, when he suddenly called out to her—Ted was waiting on him.

"Hey, you there!" he called sort of shyly. "What's your name?"

"What do *you* want to know for?" retorted Tony.

"I don't; somebody else does."

"Who?"

"None 'a your business."

"Then my name's none of yours," snapped Tony.

"All right then; who cares?" sneered Bumpy. "I don't. But you're missin' somethin'!"

"What is she missing, Bumpy?" Ted took up the questioning.

"Oh, go on, tell," coaxed Ted. Here's a sugar cookie."

"Somethin'," he merely grunted.

He took the cookie and crushed it into his mouth in a few impolite bites. Then he grinned.

"Oh, you mean thing!" Tony roared. "I wouldn't give you a cookie not if, if you were starving."

"Who's starving?" he sneered, and twisted his face up so one could hardly see his gray eyes at all.

"Say, look here, Bumps," Ted again interfered, "if you don't tell us what you mean about *her* name, I'll never give you another drink of water, not if you're choked. I'll make you buy soda like other folks."

"Well, why don't *she* tell *me* her name?" he shouted, showing what might be anger but probably was merely stubbornness.

"My name is Lottie Larkin," Tony answered mischievously. "Who wants to know?"

"The—queen," answered Bumpy, "and she's goin' to send you a present."

"A present?" exclaimed Tony, instantly sorry she had teased the boy about her name, but not willing to admit it to him. "What kind of present?"

"A dog," Bumpy grudgingly replied. And that was what Tony had been so excited about ever since.

A dog. Could she have one? Did she really want one? She wondered. She wasn't

thinking very much about dogs, these days, there were so many other interesting things to think about.

For instance, it had been more than a girlhood fancy that had made her feel there was something queer and romantic about her Daddy Tom's love for evergreens. Once she had found a sprig of cedar and a faded rose in an old letter of his; that was when they were packing to come from Cape Cod. Then, he wore a little bit of cedar in his button hole when they were traveling up in the train; he had gone back to their old garden the last thing to get it. Besides that, Martha had said it was the cedar trees around the old house that had attracted him to it when he rented the place. Putting all this together Tony remembered the first time she decided that her Daddy Tom had had a romance, a love affair in which, somehow, cedar and roses had played a part. He had never been married, had her Uncle Tom, but he always lived with his sister Martha, and they together had brought up the little girl, whom Tom had found in a fire. This was Tony's story, a story so thrilling she hardly knew it all herself.

But now it was lovely summer time, she had

just found a good friend in Ted Layton, and here she was again, over at the stand waiting for customers.

They hadn't seen Bumpy for days, and Tony was beginning to feel that he had just been teasing her about the dog.

"No, I don't think he was teasing," Ted assured her. "He hasn't got sense enough to make up such an interesting story as that. But listen to me, dearie," she drawled the words in a comical way that was part of Ted's girlish charm, "I'm going to take a day off," she continued. "I'm even going to shut up shop, because a girl friend of mine who has a car is coming to take me out. Want to come?"

"Where?" Tony asked promptly.

"Well, you see, little girl," and Ted whisked her fly chaser after what wasn't a fly at all but a pretty new butterfly, "you've been helping me a lot——"

"But I love to; this is fun," Tony interrupted.

"Maybe it's fun for you but it's work for me, so there you are!" and the fly-swatter was held aloft dramatically. "At any rate, I thought you ought to see this here town—what there is to see in it, and if you'll honor

us with coming along," Ted chatted on, striking all sorts of funny poses as she talked, "why, *I'll* be de-light-ted!"

"Of course, I'll love to go, if Aunt Mattie doesn't want me to do something very special," Tony answered.

"What would something very special be?" teased Ted.

"Well," sighed Tony, pulling at her belt and rumpling up her new blue linen dress, "you see, I promised to learn to sew after I came to New Jersey, because there's no more school this term. I used to be an awful tomboy," she confessed, a little shyly.

"You used to be!" roared Ted. "And what are you now?" She was still teasing. "Didn't I happen to see you scamper up that cherry tree the other day just to see if the cherries were getting ripe?"

"Oh, that's an easy tree to climb," scoffed Tony. "But I used to——" She was almost saying "put on boxing gloves," when she caught herself. She didn't want even to remember the accomplishment.

"What did you used to do?" Ted prodded.

"Oh, lots of things," Tony evaded. "But say, Ted, have you seen my handsome daddy lately on his handsome motor-cycle? Doesn't he look great?" she asked proudly.

"Have I seen him lately!" Ted was inclined to imitate the burlesque artists. "I should say I have! And so have a lot of other people. They call him the handsome trooper; did you know that?"

"Who calls him that?"

"Well, there you go! I can't even be complimentary without being suspected. But he is good-looking and I did hear other folks say so. Miss Landers of the Bend for instance, and the rich Mrs. Powelson, who wears a different pair of glasses for each hour of the day. They came around the other day in their million dollar autos, and while buying ten cents worth of nice, fresh peppermints, asked me who the handsome trooper was." The ingenue bowed and flirted her apron around like a chorus girl, and even found room to take a few dancing steps, for Ted Layton was lively, and she must have felt rather restricted behind that wayside stand.

Tony was radiant. She loved to hear folks praise her daddy, and even his appearance seemed to her well worth their compliments. He was her hero, ever, as she was bound to make others agree.

"But aren't you ever afraid something will happen to him?" her friend asked, when she had settled down seriously again.

"Why! What could happen to him?" Tony almost gasped at the very idea.

"What couldn't? A trooper is always in danger. He has to follow——" But Ted didn't continue to explain, for she saw how suddenly frightened Tony was, even at the vaguest thought of harm coming to her adopted daddy.

"But he's brave," declared the champion defensively.

"Of course he is," agreed Ted, laughing at her original idea, "and when a man's brave he's safe. It's the cowards who are in danger."

"That's what I always think," sighed Tony.

But her fun had been suddenly spoiled. She had apparently forgotten about the prospective auto ride, about the big "mess of frankfurters" she was going to help Ted fry for a special riding party coming around in a short time, and, in fact, all about everything but the possibility of danger to her beloved daddy.

Ted rightly interpreted the mood and was determined to dispel it at once.

"Tell you what, Tony-onie," she said merrily, "let's drop the trap-door and run over to your house for a few minutes. Then I can ask your Aunt Mattie about the ride."

"Oh, that'll be fine," replied Tony, gathering her politeness together. "Then you can get really acqainted with Aunt Mattie; you only just met her the other day."

"Any chance of the handsome trooper being home?" Ted would tease, and seemed to enjoy its effect upon her friend.

"Ted Layton!"

"Well, I've seen him go by in his car, of course," Ted replied keeping up her banter, "but to meet him in his own house, to talk to him, to tell him how we appreciate his, his vigilance." Ted paused after that effort. It seemed to have exhausted her, or at least she pretended it did. But that, of course, was merely being Teddified.

"Tell you what," she proposed again in another strain, "I'll run over to the house and get some new shiny red apples. They just came by express and I'm not going to put them out until to-morrow. But I'll get a few for the Aunt Mattie and—maybe for the handsome trooper!" She laughed uproariously at this idea, and was on her way to get the new shiny red apples, before Tony could attempt a reply.

The house was practically next door to the stand, but even that meant through a little grove of fruit trees, and half way across the

field the girl stood still, cupped her hands to her mouth and shouted:

"Hey Tony! Look out for that pie! It's a—special order!"

"All right! I will!" called back the girl behind the counter, looking critically at the pie.

It stood on the end of the stand where Ted had set it to be out of the way. It was in a box but uncovered, to cool, for it had been freshly baked. A piece of white netting draped over a milk bottle protected it.

"That's a wonderful pie," was Tony's silent comment, moving it a little farther from the oranges and nearer to the protected part.

Then she turned to re-arrange the candies. She did love to keep store; and it was so good of her Aunt Mattie to let her spend so much time there. Of course, soon swimming would be on; it was warm enough now but the lifeguards were not yet on duty, nor were the ropes up. So she wasn't allowed to go in the ocean until all these precautions against accidents were in full force.

Now she was busy with the lolly-pops and whistling—she still loved to whistle—when she heard a familiar, that is a *rather* familiar, voice behind her.

"Dog biscuits," it said.

SHE MADE ONE WILD DASH AND DID CATCH HIM, PIE AND ALL.

She turned to face Bumpy. "Oh, hello, there Bumps!" she called out gleefully. "I thought—you were sick—or something," she stumbled.

"I was," replied Bumps.

"Which?" asked Tony.

"Both," replied Bumps.

"Really sick?" Tony asked, a trifle more seriously.

"Who said I was sick?" growled the boy. But she saw again that his eyes were gray and that the growl was all in his voice. He was just pretending to be cranky.

"Why, you did," Tony confronted him boldly.

"Didn't either. I said 'somethin'."

But he wasn't bothering answering that. Instead he had grabbed the pie box!

"Oh, Bumps! Don't you dare!"

But he wasn't listening. Instead he was running off, and quick as the girl, imprisoned behind the counter with its railed gate, could free herself, she was racing after him.

"Here you!" she yelled, forgetting all about what people might say or think about her. "Come back with that pie! If I catch you——"

She made one wild dash and she did catch him, pie and all. For a few moments she

grappled with him, pounding him, banging him, knocking him, and then! They both slipped, fell into the dusty gutter, clenched like two little warriors, the boy still holding on to that pie box and the girl struggling, determined to get it.

"Give me that!" she yelled for times beyond count, and finally she mastered him and got it, the box!

Scrambling out of the gutter she held the pie box high in her one hand and was trying to gain a safe footing on the walk. But the boy too was getting up, and with a swift swing of his arm he hit the box!

Splash! The apple pie covered his face as completely as any comic-movie pie could ever have done to a face in the films.

"Oh!" screamed Tony, "the pie!"

But the next moment she was horrified to hear a shrill whistle, it was near her, right alongside of her! Almost too frightened to look, for she had heard the motor chug but paid no attention to it, she did now finally turn her head.

And there stood the State trooper, her own handsome daddy!

"Daddy!" she breathed miserably.

"Tony!" he said severely. "What does this mean?"

"Oh, Daddy!" she murmured, "I'm *so* sorry."

"So am I," the officer replied, watching the boy who was now scampering off.

"But he *stole* that pie!"

"Didn't either," shouted Bumps. "I had the money to pay for it but you didn't give me a chance."

"But *you* couldn't buy it; it was a special order?" Tony continued to argue, afraid the boy would get completely away and leave all the trouble to her.

"Guess I kin buy an old pie——"

"It was perfectly fresh! Oh, Daddy! I didn't mean to fight," wailed the miserable girl. "But Ted left me in charge——"

"Come along, Tony," the trooper interrupted her. And as she walked beside him, even while he was preparing to get in his car, she felt just like someone he had arrested.

CHAPTER IV

PATCHING IT UP

EVEN the few steps they had to walk, to reach the motor-cycle that was parked by a tree, seemed to the miserable girl like the awful walk she had seen pictures of galley slaves taking, when they were chained together and imprisoned for life. It was so awful to have been caught in that common fight.

Her daddy had hardly spoken to her, and she had not dared to look up at him, so she didn't see the sly twinkle in his blue eyes or the little pinch-tucks that trimmed his mouth.

"Want a ride, Tony-boy?" he asked, as they came up to the motor-cycle.

"Oh, no Daddy," she objected. "I'll walk."

"Why? This is a good chance to try out my car," he urged. "Why not ride over to the house with me?"

"Oh, I couldn't. Thank you, Daddy, but ——" she hesitated. She didn't want to say that getting into that car would feel just like getting into hand-cuffs to her now.

"Well, all right," he finally agreed. "But

I guess you had better run over home now," he cautiously suggested.

"All right," she replied, guiltily.

"And you better try to keep out of scraps, Tony-boy," he managed to say. She knew how he hated to scold her, in fact he never had, and never could scold at all.

"I wasn't scrapping, really Daddy," she replied a little shakily. "But I was in charge of that pie."

"Oh, I see," he answered, adjusting the big olive green motor-cycle with its commodious side car in which Tony might, at any other time, have enjoyed a wonderful ride. "When you are left in charge of anything, of course, you have to protect it," he commented, fussing with the car. "But rolling in the gutter like that doesn't look pretty; does it, Tony?" She caught his glance that time.

"I know, Daddy," she stammered. "Of course, it must have looked awful." She could just see that horrid old Bumps turning into Lenox Avenue now. "But if you knew, Daddy, how precious that pie was—— Oh, there comes Ted," she broke off suddenly, for Ted was hurrying up to them, a box of very shiny red apples in her hands. "She's coming over to our house," said Tony, ruefully.

"All right, Puss." He always said Puss

to make up for trouble. "You two run along and don't bother any more about the pie thief." He was smiling broadly now, could hardly keep any longer from laughing outright at the absurd fight over the fresh apple-pie. "Tell your Aunt Mattie I'll be home for lunch early. Good-bye, Bill," he called to her gaily. "I'll have to tell the men we've got a new trooper on the force," he chuckled, as he took his place on the seat of the car.

"Good-bye Daddy—dear," she murmured a little shyly. "And you're—awfully good—to me."

She was not through with the sigh of gratitude that was settling itself all over her, when Ted reached the gate-way in the hedge.

"What's the grand fuss?" Ted instantly asked. "And why didn't you hold the handsome trooper until I could give him an apple?" She pretended to pout over the light; but Tony was still sad, and did not respond to the jest. She was biting her lip and blinking suspiciously.

Not only that, but the girl with the dark eyes was actually gulping and sighing, and Ted feared for the worst. She was afraid Tonyette was going to cry!

"He took the pie, didn't he?" she asked, considerately.

"Ye-yes," Tony choked, allowing Ted to get hold of her arm as she had been trying to.

"Well, what do we care? It was only *one* pie."

"But it was—was your—special pie," stammered the unhappy one, with a little whispered sniffle.

"Special? You don't suppose my Aunt Nannie ever baked just *one* pie, do you? Why, she does them in flocks, like the geese when she plucks them. Come along, Kiddie," she coaxed, urging Tony toward the pretty white bungalow with the evergreen trimmings. "I've got to get back, you know," Ted kept urging. "Those boys are due for their frankfurters and you promised to help me cook them, you know."

"But I can't now," sighed the disconsolate Tony. "I just couldn't, Ted," she sighed again.

"Why so heartbroken? Didn't your daddy ever see you fighting before? Why, girlie, he may like it," went on the older girl, as they walked along in a rather desultory way. "I wouldn't wonder but he'll be proud of you. Why, you're a regular little trooper yourself, Tony," she declared gaily. "They ought to give you a motor-cycle and a badge and even a—gun!"

That was too much for Tony and she laughed now, a little hesitantly at first, as if she had no right to laugh. But as the jolly girl with the pretty yellow-red hair went on describing a girl trooper, who according to her ideas ought to look and act exactly like Tony, she who had been almost crying was now quite frankly laughing.

Martha was out weeding the flower bed. She dropped her trowel and took off the cotton working gloves to greet the girls. Tony was proud of her, as usual, for the outdoor work seemed to make Mattie Potter fairly glow; her eyes (blue like Tom's) were bright and merry, and those streaks of color, that were shot through her cheeks, were as red-velvety as the rose-bud on the new bush that was just breaking into bloom. Her dress was, as usual, the simple white one-piece linen—Martha had probably acquired that fashion from the Boston Domestic Science School she recently attended.

"What lovely apples!" she exclaimed as anyone would if offered the box Ted was offering her. "I didn't know there were any as fine as these in the market," she continued. "Come up on the porch, girls," she invited them cordially. "Isn't this a perfect day?"

"It's glorious," replied Ted, dropping her

bantering tone to one of studied politeness. "That's what *I* came over for, Miss Potter," she continued taking advantage of the opening. "I want to ask you if you'll let Tony take a long auto ride with me tomorrow? We may go early and take our lunch along, if you'll let her come."

"That would be very nice indeed," Martha promptly agreed, glancing at Tony again wondering why she was so silent. She also noticed a lot of spots on her dress, but made no remarks about them.

Ted saw the question in her looks and wisely attempted to answer it, before any new complications might add to Tony's embarrassment.

"It was all about my pie, Miss Potter," she said brightly. "Poor little Tony attempted to defend it, but Bumps—you know he's the funny boy with a real name too fancy for him—well, he ran off with the pie and why shouldn't Tony run after him?"

"And I didn't intend *at all,"* Tony put in most emphatically, "to hit him—or anything."

"Hit him!" her Aunt Mattie questioned in surprise. It was so absurd.

"And then we stumbled and fell in the gutter——"

"Antoinette!"

"But I got up just as quickly as I could, Aunt Mattie——"

"And just then, just in time," Ted interrupted charitably, "Officer Potter came along——"

"Oh, Tony! Your daddy didn't see you fighting with a boy!" murmured Martha.

"She really wasn't fighting with the boy," again Ted intervened, and no one but Martha saw the wink, "she was fighting to get my—pie!"

"And Daddy just said—well," stammered poor Tony, "he said I could have a ride in his car but I didn't want it," she finished lamely.

Martha had no idea of saying anything cross; she never needed to do that, for the culprit was miserable enough. And if anyone could have peeked into Tony's mind, they would have seen there just such anxiety and regret as had possessed her the day she tried out Caleb Hawkins' boxing gloves; so long ago that seemed now. She couldn't forget how she felt there, on the edge of that gutter, pie spattered all over her dress, and that awful boy Bumps making wild attempts to regain the coveted box. And then her daddy came along!

"I just have been wondering what happened to your dress, Babe," Martha said now, know-

ing the magic that little pet name could invoke. "And so it's pie! How funny! To have a pie battle——"

"It wasn't funny," protested the girl trying now to cover up some of the pie spots with absurdly out-stretched hands. "And when I catch that boy——"

"Now Tony!" warned her aunt, just the least bit severely, "you must control your temper. Girls do—not—fight! Not nice girls, at any rate," she added, smiling toward Ted, who for once in her life, didn't seem to know just what to say.

CHAPTER V

WHEN TONY WAS TINY

To understand why Tony felt as she did when her foster father, Tom Potter "the handsome trooper," found her wrestling with Bumps for Ted's precious pie, it will be necessary to go back a number of years in this girl's life. But since her very babyhood was unusually interesting, and even tragic in its happenings, and since all of those early years had so much to do with making her the girl she was when she met and began chumming with Ted Layton, the story must be told in detail to do it justice.

In the first of these two volumes, that entitled, "A Girl Called Ted," we formed our acquaintance with Ted Layton. She it was who went to visit her cousin Cecy at Lake Pohatcong, where Cecy had been living in constant fear of some weird noise and flashing lights, that did really "happen" in a glen near Cecy's pretty cottage on the shores of the big lake up north. But although it took Ted and her friends all summer to run down

the mystery, run it down they did and had a fine time, with innumerable thrilling adventures, in the running. This is all told in the volume entitled "A Girl Called Ted," so that meeting Ted again as she met Tony, down at the New Jersey coast town, we know a lot about her but scarcely anything about Tony. Tony was younger than Ted, a few years at least, but she was ages younger in her disposition.

As there are reasons for everything, except too much home work and too little time for fun, as some girls will readily declare, there are reasons why Antoinette Potter was so different from the general run of girls. She was the adopted daughter of Tom and Martha Potter, two friends better than many relatives could have possibly been. So here is Tony's early story.

It was a night so calm the very stillness seemed ominous. Out on Cape Cod Bay dots of light from drowsing craft picked holes, here and there, in the hidden waters, like broken stars spilled out into gleaming blotches, flickering and uncertain.

Inland the cottage lights were equally indifferent, so few folks stayed over winter in Duneslay, and it was now early November. And the natives were used to the black night,

they were not wasteful with lights; they could fish in the dark and what was more important?

But the Life Saving Station—that was never dark. The government paid for the lights there and the money was well spent, for most of the bright spots in Duneslay's many black nights were shot out from the windows of that coast guard house.

"Turn them on, boys," Tom Potter would say. "Pretty dark along the front tonight," Tom, big, hale and good-natured always, was also considerate. He was by no means an old man, young men make the best life-savers, but he was settled. He had a dreamy way about him sometimes, like a man who had been disappointed in something very dear to him. Yet, he was usually jolly on the outside. No man at the station was better liked nor better acquainted along the coast line that marked his patrol, ten miles walked every night, winter and summer.

But tonight the darkness was appalling. Tom left his chair beside the reading table and sauntered outside to "take a look at things." A few late season autos shot by without so much as a friendly salute with their horns; the fish-boat had come in, there was

the chug of the motor; hoped they got a good haul, Tom did.

Through the darkness he peered down toward the little fisher settlement, over by Round Pond.

What was that speck of light! A spark! A blaze—a flame——

"Fire!" yelled Tom Potter. "Get busy, boys. It's over on Round Pond bank."

No words were wasted by the men that piled into the auto, and presently went dashing down the lonely ocean boulevard. A fire in that little fisher-village might mean anything—or nothing but a bonfire of useless driftwood.

The men in the auto were standing, peering, searching like the fire fighters they were. Swerving a corner they came in view of the flame lighted smoke shaft, curling up——

"There it is!" more than one man exclaimed. "Gee-whizz! It's Mrs. Winters'!"

"Mrs. Winters'!"

"Yes, and we've got to get in there quick," declared Tom Potter. "She has a little baby there, alone with her."

"But you can't, man. Look at the smoke and that box of a shack——"

"Let go, Jack. I'll be—careful!"

But he wasn't careful, of himself, not Tom Potter. Even the flames blocking his way at one end of the burning shack did not deter him.

"The water's on! This way!" Shout after shout of orders and directions went from one to the other of the coast guardsmen, before the volunteer firemen of the village reached the spot, but once there, they all did valiant work.

"Where's Tom?" Jack Evans made chance to ask. He suspected Tom was not taking care of himself and this was a bad fire—for a small one.

"Where's Mrs. Winters?" demanded someone else, as if that answered Jack.

Then they heard a call. It was Tom's voice.

"Where are you, Mary?" he was shouting.

But he was also pushing his way in through that smoke.

"It's all on the roof, a chimney fire," called out Chief Donahue of the firemen, " 'Twon't be so bad if we can keep it there."

"But there's a woman and baby somewhere," Jack Evans again shouted back, "and Tom Potter's going to find them."

"A woman and baby! Thought the place was empty——"

"It's Mrs. Winters' place."

"That poor little widow?"

"Husband only died this summer——"

But Tom heard none of this. He had managed to push in the small door, in spite of the blanket of smoke that fell about him.

"Where—are—you?" he shouted again. "Mary? It's Tom. Where's the baby?"

Something, but not the voice he had hoped for, urged him a few steps farther. Then he saw her. Mary Weaver! The girl he used to know before she married Ed Winters. For a single instant Tom drew in his breath and then blew it out—in smoke.

The girl lying there was Jessie Weaver's little sister Mary. And he used to play with her when he went to see his sweetheart, Jessie.

"Mary!" he spoke, as he lifted the almost unconscious form. "It's Tom. Where's—the —baby?"

"In the bed—room. Back——" The young mother's head fell into Tom's arms as she tried to tell him, and when the men took the senseless burden from him, as he stumbled out to them waiting for the tragic rescue, he went back in spite of them.

"Hold him, Dick," a comrade shouted, for the men were trying to save Mary Winters'

life and she was smothering, even with the breath of air they were fanning into her weakened lungs. "Don't let Tom go in there again!" came someone's call over the din of fearful confusion.

But Tom pushed past them. "In the bedroom, at the back," he was repeating, just as a roar warned him not to go in there again.

"The chimney's down!" came a shout from the fireman. "Look out——!"

"Don't try that, Tom!"

No matter, Tom was trying it. With his small hatchet and a sure swing of his strong arm, he was cutting a hole in the back of that shack. Then he thrust his head in. By the flame's wicked light he could see the bedroom; the furniture still stood there.

He crawled in a little farther. He was low enough to be on the floor and he could see—under the bed!

"There she is!" he gasped. "That baby! Under that bed!"

So Tom Potter rescued little Antoinette Winters. The darling little thing just grabbed Tom around the neck, and seemed to love him instantly, wet clothes, fire hat and all. And gurgling happily she tried to push his big hat off his head, first thing.

"You poor mite!" he whispered. "Your

ma—is gone, I'm afraid. But you've got grit. A good thing for you, little Tony Winters," he told her. And that was how she got the name Tony. The word sprang to Tom's lips as he looked into her eyes. But he didn't know how appropriate it was. He never thought of the little tomboy. How could he have known then that Tony was a name peculiarly suited to the mite he was taking charge of? Tony she was from that tragic moment.

The Duneslay folks had held a little meeting, after they buried Mary Winters in the same grave they had buried her husband, Ed Winters, only six months before.

"Nothing could seem more tragic," said Laura Applegate to the few other women who came to the meeting. "That the child's father should have been drowned and then her mother to go—this way!"

Joe Brennen heard her say that. "Yes," he spoke up, "and Ed Winters died a hero. He wouldn't have lost his own life in that fishing smack if he hadn't a-been trying to save Jed Dobson. And Ed havin' no folks makes it all the more personal on us." Joe acted more like a mayor than did Theodore Decker, although Nantanket had elected Theodore as mayor every year for seven years past.

"But the child must have *some* folks," insisted Mrs. Broadbent, not as broad in character as her name might have implied.

"Folks!" hissed Joe Brennen. No one liked Mrs. Broadbent's stingy way. "No use lookin' for folks. Ed wouldn't like that and we owe Ed's memory somethin'——"

"That youngster's got folks right here," thundered Tom Potter, for Mrs. Broadbent's benefit and for any others like her who might be sulky there, worrying about poor children and the town taxes.

So it happened that Tony Winters, aged two years and a few months, became the pet of Nantanket Point. First, Laura Applegate took her and she kept her until Tony was old enough to go to school. Then Miss Applegate consulted with Tom Potter.

"You see, Tom," she pointed out, "Tony must go to school——"

"Sure thing," agreed Tom promptly.

"And I have no way of sending her——"

"You've done more than your share, Laura," broke in Tom, still coast guardsman, and still listened to when he said anything.

"Done for her!" echoed Laura, and her voice did have in it then a dreamy, echoing quality, "she's done more for me, Tom. I love that child——"

His eyes were as soft as his voice. They found hers blinking back a gathering mist.

"I know, Laura," he admitted. "She has a way with her—little Tony has." He paused, looked out over the bay from the window of the coast guard station. "I'd like to take her myself——"

"Why don't you?"

"Martha's coming back in a week or two and——"

"Your sister Martha would love—my Tony. I hate to give her up, Tom." (Laura was actually sniffling.) "But I'm thinking of you."

"Of—me?"

"Yes. You and Jessie Weaver, that baby's aunt, were very good friends once." Laura might have said sweethearts, had she dared to say it.

"Oh, that's all right," Tom drawled indifferently. "I'd do the same for any baby I'd find under a bed, hiding from a fire. Wasn't she smart to crawl in there? Saved her own life, little Tony did, for those bricks from that chimney flew thick and fast, I can tell you." What wonderful eyes Tom Potter had! As deep a blue as the sea he was now staring at without seeing it.

"And she's—well, Tom, I may as well say

it," sighed Laura, with a curious little smile, "she's getting too smart for me!"

"Too smart for you, Laura!" roared Tom, delightedly. "That's a good one." And his laugh kept chuckling back at him. "She's a great kid! Going to amount to something," and he whacked his own thighs to show what real strength could mean.

"But about Jessie Weaver, Tom. Her aunt, you know," Laura said, very cautiously, watching Tom's face as she spoke, for Jessie had been a very pretty girl who just visited at Duneslay long enough, folks said, to break young Tom Potter's heart. That had happened about ten years ago.

Tom rubbed his chin and shifted about a little uneasily before he answered Laura. Then he threw his head up, as a horse will when he takes a fresh start.

"I'll tell you, Laura," he began. "I never talk about—Jessie, so don't let us get going in that direction. We can take care of little Tony without any help from the Weavers, wherever they are."

"But you have spent so much on her now, Tom," Laura protested. "And if you'll just let me say this much: even the Weavers are *not poor.*"

"But Ed Winters didn't ask any odds of them."

"Well, Ed was here then to take care of his own child," Laura insisted upon pointing out. She had to watch Tom's face as she did so, for she did not want to provoke him too far. But she did want to think of Jessie Weaver.

"Now Laura," he finally replied, his voice as serious as his expression, "we'll take care of Tony without bothering the Weaver folks. You're right about sending her to school, though. We'll have to arrange for that, right off."

"If you really meant that your sister Martha is coming back, Tom," Laura pursued, "why not try the baby yourselves? You'd love her, Tom——"

"I know, I know," the life-guard broke in. "Yes, I guess we might try a hand at her," he cautiously conceded. "She is the cutest little girl, and she's got grit——"

"But, you don't suppose I'm going to let you take her without the directions; do you, Tom? Not after I've been doing my best with her for six years," declared Laura. It would be a wrench to surrender Tony even to Tom.

"Send the directions along with the parcel," Tom agreed, "and we'll do our best to follow them." Then he went over to Laura and took hold of her hand. "Won't it sort of break you up to let her go, Laura?" he asked kindly.

"Tom," she said in a brand new voice, "I've got a chance to go to Europe as a lady's companion, and I've wanted to go all my life——"

"Then you run right along," ordered Tom smiling. "I'm glad you're going to get your heart's wish, Laura. There isn't anything like it—so they say," he wound up dreamily.

CHAPTER VI

PACKING UP

BUT the real reason why Laura Applegate had decided to surrender her frisky little charge to Tom, was not because Tony was getting too smart for her. Nor was it altogether because Laura actually was planning to go to Europe with the wealthy Mrs. Thurston; no, Laura had quite another reason. She knew how much Tom loved the little mite he had pulled out from under the burning bed. Laura had listened often to Tom's favorite story for Tony—the one he made up about Tony herself, when she was old enough and had insisted upon knowing who she was.

"You're just Tony," Tom would say, "and I'm your guardian."

"Oh, how lovely!" the child would exclaim, "to have a guardian. But you are my Daddy-Tom, I like that better. And where did you find me?" she would ask every time she could hold on to Tom long enough to hope for the story.

"You came floating in on a mermaid's back

one day after a big storm, and I told the mermaid I'd try to make you mind."

"But you can't, can you?" little Tony would dare him. "See me walk out on the beam, and if I fall in the ocean——"

And out she would go just to have him go after her, over those angry waters, walking on the narrow beams that headed the breakwater. But she always got a ride in again on Tom's back.

Laura thought of all this now as she talked with Tom. It would be safer, perhaps, to have some one stronger minded than herself to manage the child, but even that was not why she was going to give her up.

It really was because she wanted Tom to have Tony all to himself, for Laura was one of the many people who believed Tom a real hero and therefore tried to make him happier than his solitary life indicated him to be. His sister Martha, who had been living with her cousin out Boston way, was again coming to live at Duneslay, and the first inkling of that news had brought Laura to the Life Saving Station to talk with Tom, for this should make it possible for him to take the frisky little Tony to his own home.

"Yes," she repeated after him, "it must be

wonderful for anyone to get their heart's desire. I wish you could get yours, Tom."

He looked at her sharply then, but she smiled bravely.

"Me?" Tom scoffed. "With a—heart's desire?"

"Try Tony," suggested Laura. "She's like a witch, sometimes. And you know, she is going to be more expense from now on. Girls need a lot of things," the little woman pointed out wisely.

"Oh, that'll be all right," Tom interrupted. "Martha and I can manage that."

"But this town——"

"No, Laura. My little Tony has got nothing to do with the town." Each word sounded like a stone hitting against a board fence. "I found her, and it has always seemed to me as if she was mine, somehow; I mean mine to look out for, you see." It was not easy for him to express such sentiment.

"Well, you've done it," Laura declared, shaking her head and biting her lip.

"And you've done your share." Tom threw his head up and brushed a hand across his lips.

"But I had your money to do it with——"

And so they hit their compliments back and

forth, each knowing the other's claim to generosity, and not being personally willing to take more than a small share of the credit.

All of which explains Tony, somewhat. But not entirely, for then Tony was growing up. She was, what most folks called, a big girl, and once again the child had changed homes. She now lived with Martha and Tom Potter and this was wonderful for all of them. Tom lived at home when he was off duty at the life-guard station, but when he was on duty Tony was apt to be "on duty" also. She liked nothing better than running in and out of the station, and no matter how much or how often Tom ordered her to stay home, she only laughed at him and, calling him Daddy-Tom, would insist that she too was going into "the service" as soon as she got big enough. And presently she imagined that the time had come.

"Now, Daddy-Tom," she would argue, "you know I can wind a rope as good as Dick can. You said so the other day."

"But how about sewing buttons on?" Tom would ask in answer. "Your Aunt Martha doesn't exactly praise your sewing——"

"Oh, sewing! What's that? Any girl can sew. But I can run a boat out——"

And so they would dispute and "scrap," as

Tom called it. But he seemed to like it, just the same. Tony knew a lot about the rules and ways of life-saving, and that pleased the brave and fearless guard, although he would never have admitted it.

They lived in a comfortable little place on the back road. Martha Potter did not like the ocean, she hated its roar, and she didn't like its dampness, couldn't stand it, she declared. So when Tom found this place, just a nice walk from the ocean, he bought it, and Martha furnished it. Tony's room was over the small porch, and she loved it. But when she would look far out from her window and glimpse the ocean from it, Martha would shudder.

"She doesn't know about her father," she would secretly sigh. "And she must not know —yet. It is bad enough to have to know about her mother. Poor little girl——"

Being petted like that is not what one would have called healthy, meaning that it was not good for Tony's character, for it saved her or kept from her her due in discipline. No one bossed her. She did not miss what she had never had, but she was growing more independent daily. She loved Martha and Tom, and would follow their slightest wish, if she could guess they wished it, but she had

no patience with Sally Freeman, for instance. Sally was a very nice little girl too. She liked to play with Tony, and they would often go off sailing their boats in the pond. But likely quite as often Tony would come home alone, and not bother to tell her Aunt Martha that she and Sally had had another fight.

Sally's mother had warned her not to go out in the row-boat beyond a certain point, that line known as the channel. So Sally, being properly brought up, simply wouldn't go. Then Tony would go alone, and keep on rowing until she reached the "jumping off place," when she would jump, wade out and run home. Mad!

"'Fraid cat," was about all she would say about it, until the next time. Then they would try something else.

But Tony was naturally good-natured, and what she called scraps were really nothing more than an expression of character. She was now showing that same grit Tom used to boast about to Laura Applegate. And she would not easily turn from any purpose, once she had become determined to accomplish it.

And that was what happened the very day she was almost drowned. Jed Dobson, an old fisherman, was very fond of Tony, and well he might be, for it was Tony's own father,

young Ed Winters, who gave up his life on that same ocean in a storm six years before, to save the life of Jed Dobson.

But Jed's boat was later run by motor, and as a happy little girl Tony loved to sail out with him to 'tend the engine. He hated to refuse her when she begged to go, but the storm coming on this particular day should have warned him.

"You shouldn't ought to have come, Tony," Jed declared, when a great wave splashed over their boat.

"No," scoffed Tony. "Maybe I had ought to have let you come alone. Look out!" she called to him, just as the boat swung like a top in the swirling sea, and something black hit Jed's head.

Jed tried to get up but he was hurt—hit by a log that had rolled in on a wave. After that Tony had to run the boat. And when she could no longer manage it, when the waves threatened to swallow her up just as they had her father, it was the guards from the Life Saving Station that came to the rescue.

"You—Tony!" was all Tom Potter could say, when he dragged her away from that engine. But when they got the small boat ashore, Tom determined the girl should be taken away from all this. It was too perilous

for a child as daring as she. He didn't scold her, she had saved Jed Dobson's life, and everyone was praising her, in a queer way that kept from her the story of her father's sacrifice. Little Tony Potter had actually saved a life.

But Martha knew. She knew that if they stayed in Duneslay it would no longer be possible to keep from Tony the story of her parent's tragic fate. So she readily agreed now with Tom that it would be best for him to accept the new job the government had lately offered him. He could then become one of the State police at a New Jersey coast town, and he could, if he wished it, leave his beloved Cape Cod, for this inland post.

"We've got to get her away from the water here," Tom said to Martha, after the storm experience. "It won't be so bad any place else. But here after her mother and father going we can't take any more risks with Tony."

"And then, nobody'll tell her. I'll tell her myself soon, but I don't want others frightening the child." Poor Martha. Her chief worry was that someone who might be gossipy and not know how to do it prudently, would tell Tony that her mother and father had both met tragic deaths, and that she was

a little girl picked out of a fire by Tom Potter.

"Now see here, Martha," Tom suddenly asserted himself, "there's no sense in your worrying about Tony hearing her own story. Why, you're looking thin since you came back." He dropped the paper he had been reading and turned his critical gaze upon Martha.

She was what might well be called a comfortable looking woman—and she possessed the indescribable gentle art of making others comfortable. Like her brother Tom, she was florid, with blue eyes and lovely healthy clear skin. Her brown hair tumbled around her head in becoming cascades, in spite of determined hairpins, and she always wore nice light (if not white) wash dresses which made her look a lovely friendly nurse.

Martha Potter had studied home economics at an extension college course, that had once extended to a small city near Duneslay. She was ambitious and progressive, which explains why she would make long stays in Boston. More than once she had held positions in the big New England city and—well—Martha Potter was, taken all in all, rather a capable woman.

But mothering! And mothering a child

such as Tony was getting to be, that was different.

"Thin!" she repeated now after Tom who had accused her of failing through anxiety, "I just wish I was getting thin."

"Well, you are," Tom insisted, and manlike added—"and there's no sense in it. Tony is all right. Got a good home, growing up strong and if she does hear how her folks died, where's the harm, in that? I'm thinking, Mattie," he said this very slowly and deliberately, "that *you* ought to tell her."

"Me tell her now? Tom Potter, what are you talking about? That would be like, well like choking a bird or something," said Mattie, trying to express by simile, what it might mean to darken the joy in Tony's young life by the story of her parents' tragedies. "No, Tom, if that has to be told now, *you* will have to tell it."

Tom picked up his paper again, in self defense. But he was thinking of the little girl so harmless, so helpless and yet too strong in her young happiness for these old-fashioned Cape Codders to manage wisely.

Tony then was not actually pretty, taken feature by feature, but she was like a little human magnet—awfully drawing. Her olive skin defied everything and anything the ele-

ments tried to do to it; they didn't. Her skin stayed just as clear and olivey as if it had never been out in the wind and rain and sun and whatever else was there? She was sure to have been out in a good part of it, whatever it was. And if it was dampness it made her black hair curl more evenly about her round face, if it was sunshine it set fire to her dark eyes and made them more sparkling like diamonds in black agates, if it was wind it always made Tony want to fly with it—she loved a nice, brisk, clear, windy day after a rain, when the waters on all the little lakes would look as blue as the skies upon which there were sure to be fleecy white clouds, hurrying off to catch up with the storm that had run away from them.

"She looks like her mother," Martha would tell Tom, when Tony would not be around to overhear. She had just told him that again.

"Yes," Tom would answer abstractedly.

"But her eyes are like Jessie's——"

"Tony is all right," Tom interrupted, as he always did when Jessie Weaver's name was mentioned. Once Laura Applegate had attempted to prompt him in that direction but he squelched her, just as he did Martha now.

"But I'll be glad when we move. Of course, we have always called this home," Martha

reflected. "But it will be a change for all of us and maybe better for Tony."

"How better?" Tom was very tantalizing today.

"Well, among strangers, you know, Tom," his sister continued amiably, "it won't be so —so sort of conspicuous."

"What won't?"

"That she isn't ours, of course," Martha's voice was becoming more positive.

"Isn't ours? Why isn't she?"

"Tom, we haven't even tried to adopt her."

"Say!" There was a volume of contempt in that one little word, not for Mattie but for the adoption idea. He got up and began the usual walk a big man like him always takes refuge in. He stopped the second time he walked past Mattie.

"Didn't her dying mother put her in my arms and ask me to care for her?"

"Yes, Tom."

"Then that ought to be enough for anybody. What do you want me to nail up for you? Are the dishes ready? Those two barrels want to be headed up; do they?" quickly he changed the subject.

Brother and sister then returned to the simple tasks of packing up the goods, this, of course, was just before they had moved away

to the little state of New Jersey. They worked in silence, but how riotous were their thoughts and emotions? Tony! Little Tony! The little girl they had taken into their hearts! Why were mere parents considered so much more important than such loving, devoted protectors as were these two?

"Where is she?" Tom asked suddenly, bringing his hammer tattoo to a sharp stop.

"Out playing, I guess. She offered to help, but Sally called her. I thought I'd let her go out and take a run," Martha continued. "She runs like a young colt."

"Doesn't she," agreed Tom, putting away his tools and preparing to start for the Station.

CHAPTER VII

CRUEL DISAPPOINTMENT

AND all of this love, which was showered upon Tony in her earliest years, had made her just the strange, impulsive and all but undisciplined girl she was today. Too much love without the wise little lessons of restraint, so important to young girlhood, is just like too much sunshine to a flower without any rain, or too much joy without serious thoughts. Too much of any good thing is usually too much. And down there in old Cape Cod Tony's days were so different from those of other girls, that to understand her now and to forgive her wild outbursts we must go back to those days again.

They were packing to move, and Tom and Martha had just been discussing Tony's problems when Tom stopped suddenly and was soon ready to go to the Life Saving Station. He shut the back door without slamming it but it was clicked tight just the same. His blue uniform and his blue cap were carefully

brushed, and his shoes well shined, for Tom Potter was always a credit to the service, and as he started down the path toward the back gate he was the picture of a model coast guardsman. His shoulders square, his head held high; good looking Tom!

"Hello Daddy!" came a piping voice to meet him. "Come see!"

"Hello there, Tony," he answered jovially, feeling that nearness toward the child he always felt after a talk with Martha. "What are you doing there?"

"Come see!" ordered the girl in the white blouse and blue skirt. She was holding her hands both behind her, evidently hiding something.

He walked up to her playfully and just as he reached her she brought her hand out and —Biff! Tom felt something bulky hit him in the face!

"Why, Tony! What are you up to? Where did you get those gloves?" he asked in surprise. And he wasn't smiling either. He was staring at her big gloves that encased her hands.

"Borrowed them," declared the undaunted Tony. "Want to have a round? I can box better than——"

"Tony Potter!" he checked her, using the name that meant he was serious. "Who said you could——get boxing gloves?"

"Nobody. But you always told me to fight for myself and how am I going to do it if I can't box?" There was an unmistakable note of disappointment in her voice now, and she was rubbing one of the ugly big gloves against the other, defiantly.

"That's no girl's play, Tony," Tom declared, still speaking sharply. "Why don't you act like a girl? You're getting old enough now, you know."

"Act like a girl?" she shrilled in no pretty way. "I hate the way girls act. They're——sneaks!"

"Tony! You hush," ordered Tom, his voice still rising. "Here," he put his hand out. "Give me those gloves."

She stepped back and again hid her hands with the big ugly, padded things on them. "I want them," she said saucily, her face upturned to meet the look she was so surprised to see in his.

"But you can't have them. They're no girl's play toy. Who gave you them?" Tom demanded.

"As if I'd tell." Her lips curled scornfully as she still defied him.

"Tony. Do you know you are saucy?" Big Tom Potter's voice was trembling. He was more surprised than angry. Didn't the child understand?

Jumping back still farther, the little tam o'shanter hat on her dark head flew up as she swung around, making absurd passes with the boxing gloves. She was biffing at the air but she did it well—better than Tom liked to see her do it.

He started toward her. That precipitated a run and, as if nothing more than some simple game were under way, Tony deliberately raced into the barn, ran up the loft ladder, and before Tom could follow, she had swung herself out the little side window and was now prettily poised on the roof. There she stood holding gracefully on to the cupola with a hand no longer gloved, while with the other she threw, first one of the gloves, and then the other, at the man standing down in the driveway.

"Catch!" she called merrily. "Want me to see if there's any leaky shingles?" She was pretending to examine the roof, but Tom had not laughed at her; he had not even smiled. He was puzzled, perplexed.

"Are you coming down?" he asked gravely.

"Why, Daddy-Tom, do you want me?" she

sang back at that, straightening her flying skirt, and trying to hold on to the flag-pole at the same time.

"Yes, come down," Tom said emphatically.

"Oh, all right. But I thought——" She had crawled in the window again and the next moment was climbing down the loft ladder. Landing, she brushed her cap and took some sticks out of her hair, but she couldn't hide the big hole in her stocking. That had caught in a sharp stick when she climbed out the window, and they were her school stockings, too. Her cheeks blazed and her eyes danced, but Tony was not giving in. This sort of treatment from her Daddy-Tom was new to her, and she plainly resented it.

"Mad?" she asked saucily, turning her head from side to side coquettishly.

"I haven't time to talk to you now, Tony," Tom replied, "but we will have a talk when I get back tonight, if you're up. I don't want you to say anything about this to your Aunt Mattie, now understand," he warned her. "She's worried enough about packing," he added, as he prepared to leave her. "But you have got to act more like a girl." He only half formed the words; they seemed so inadequate, yet he could do no better in his attempt to correct her.

"But you always taught me to act like a boy?" again Tony challenged him. She too was puzzled.

"Yes, maybe it's my fault," the coast guardsman was liberal enough to admit. "But anyhow, we have got to talk it over."

He turned to go, the boxing gloves still in his hands, and he was not even saying good bye to her.

For a moment she stood there, speechless, staring after him; he was taking the gloves!

"I have to have those gloves," she called shrilly, and she did not use his name as she should have done in calling to him.

"Well, you can't," he shot back, decidedly.

"But I have to! I have to give them back ——" She stopped. She just wouldn't tell him who had lent them to her. But she had to have them back!

Quick as some light footed animal, she crept up behind him, made a deft move and grabbed the gloves that were in his hands held behind him. She was scampering off before he had recovered from his surprise, before he had a chance to call after her. And she couldn't possibly know he had almost smiled as he saw her go.

"Tony!" he yelled the next minute. "What do you mean?"

But Tony wasn't taking any chances with those gloves. She had promised to fetch them back to Caleb Hawkins at five o'clock and she was now on her way to do so.

Tom's mouth curled into that restrained smile. "Poor little kid," he was thinking. "Boxing! Learning to defend herself! Well ——" his smile grew broader as he pondered. Wasn't she funny? And how cunning she had looked perched against the flag-pole on the roof of the barn.

He was almost laughing aloud now, and when Dick Brown, one of the life savers, sauntered by with his usual drawling greeting, Tom actually overlooked him; he was so engrossed with this new stunt of Tony's. Boxing! A little girl, how old was she anyhow? He stopped to count. More than twelve! It did not seem possible. But she was. Well, he supposed she would soon begin to assert herself. And Martha was right, it would be better for Tony Potter to get away from Duneslay before folks forgot she was no longer a baby. They were so queer about things that were no one's business, and better forgotten if one could forget.

So Tom Potter took up his station duties; but all that evening (he was on the night patrol) he kept thinking of Tony and her un-

certain future. He was more troubled about her than he had ever been before.

At home, Tony was thinking along the same lines, but in a very different way. She had helped her Aunt Martha with the packing, as her Uncle Tom had suggested, but something had happened to Tony. She had never before been scolded like that by the big, good-natured man who was her Daddy-Tom and her Uncle Tom and her general protector, under whatever name she chose to call him.

"And I didn't do a thing," poor Tony kept insisting to herself. "Just trying Caleb's gloves——"

A sense of injustice, or unwarranted injury, took possession of the girl. Every minute seemed to add to its intensity, until Martha, at her packing case, could now scarcely get Tony to answer even her most simple questions.

"You must be sick, Tony," she declared, after two attempts to get the girl to tell her if she had packed the silver cake-basket in with the sofa cushions. "I never saw you act like this before."

"I never acted like this before," answered Tony, surprising herself that she did so in that quick, sharp way.

"What's the matter? Can't you tell Aunt Mattie?" How kindly her Aunt Mattie said that.

"No." An impressive silence followed the little word. Tony was acting. She was getting a new kind of attention and it was amusing. Really not meaning to bring on the complications that were sure to follow, she kept up the unexpected turn her stubbornness had taken.

"Did you fall this afternoon?" asked the perplexed Martha, now leaving off everything but her attempt to get at the trouble. She was standing there just watching Tony, surprised, perplexed and anxious.

"Yes, I did but I didn't hurt myself," Tony answered, her sullen manner changing not one whit; it was so easy to keep it up although she knew it was mean.

"You must have," Martha insisted. "Maybe if——"

"Oh, I'm not a baby, Aunt Mattie," the unreasonable girl flung back, "and I wish you wouldn't treat me as one."

If the house had been struck by lightning Mattie Potter could not have been more thunderstruck. That little Tony Potter should and did answer her like that! She stood there staring at her in blank amazement.

"Tony!" she said finally. "Tony, what—is the—matter?"

Unable to say more, Tony fled from the room, tears getting the better of her and something trying to choke her. Once up the stairs, she flung herself upon her bed and gave way to this horrible feeling that was strangling her. She cried, sobbed, moaned. Oh, why had they changed toward her? Why didn't they understand! What had she done? Daddy-Tom looked so—so black at her when he had scolded.

Mattie heard the sobbing and hurried up to her. She was standing over her now. "Tony darling," she was saying, "you *must* tell Aunt Mattie. You know we never have any secrets, darling. Tell me."

"But I can't," sobbed Tony, and it was quite true this time.

"You will make yourself really ill, Tony," she was trying to soothe and to comfort, and to get the girl on the bed to turn her head around and not smother so in the pillow. "Whatever happened to you?" the motherly one was begging to know. "You must have —did you fall when you were out in the barn?"

"Yes." Just one sigh said the word for her.

"From the—loft."

"Part way——" But Tony didn't mean to make——

"Then you must be hurt? Why didn't you tell me? Let me see——"

"I can't, I can't," wailed Tony, who was speaking the truth, but the poor Truth would not have recognized itself under such absurd conditions.

"Then I'll have to send for your uncle——"

"Oh, no—no—no!" begged the sobbing girl. "I don't want to see him——"

"Then I'll have to send for Dr. Morton."

"But—I'm not hurt!" Tony actually yelled this, for the threat of Dr. Morton's ministrations was no joke.

"Maybe it's your leg; your stocking was all torn. Let me see. That's a good little girl——"

"I'm not a little girl. I'm near thirteen years old——" The imp of perversity was whispering to her again.

"Well, don't get so excited. I know just how old you are. Dear me!" sighed the distracted Martha. "If you won't let me look you over, I'll go get you a nice drink of lemonade. That'll fix you up," and the shadow flitted off.

A sense of guilt overwhelmed the miserable girl when that door closed so gently behind

good kind, gentle Martha! Why should any one deceive her?

"But Daddy-Tom," Tony promptly dismissed the worthier feeling, "he scolded. And he never scolded me like that before." Tears again threatened to blind her, for she did most sincerely love her Daddy-Tom. And with the tears came resentment. "They should not treat her so," the unreasonable girl kept repeating, although they had then, as always, treated her most lovingly. "And he wanted me to look out for myself, and he used to show me how to put my fists up when I was so little. As if I didn't remember."

Remembering how Tom Potter had taught her to put her baby fists up, had a queer effect now upon the girl variously called Tony. Instead of inspiring her with greater love for those two good people, who were standing between her and the whole world as sincerely as any parents might have stood, it made her rebellious. She was now actually putting her fists up against them!

"Now when I'm old enough to do things for myself," she was secretly grumbling, "they don't want me to."

But that wasn't it at all. Poor little Tony! She did not even understand her own feelings. It was all just a matter of disappointment.

She had been practicing with those horrid, clumsy old boxing gloves for days, to show her Daddy-Tom how fine she could use them, and when she tried to show him he had scolded!

Tears were coming now, dripping out the corners of her eyes and tickling her cheeks. She couldn't bear to think of her humiliation, of how he had scolded her and actually taken the old gloves from her.

Resentment came again to chase away her better thoughts. It was the same bitterness that grown folks feel, only more cruel, because it struck at a helpless little girl like Tony. At least she thought so, but the wrong was all with herself, and the more she encouraged it the more harm it was sure to do her. She might do something rash just to show off.

"Now, dearie," spoke Martha, who had returned with a drink of lemonade in the blue and gold cup too, and that had been all packed up—"now," said Martha coaxingly, "just you drink this and go to sleep. You will be as bright as the sunshine in the morning."

Tony wanted to confess; to throw her arms around darling Martha and own up that there was nothing the matter with her; that she was cheating, that Martha should have scolded instead of petting her, and that Martha should

be in bed after her hard day's work at packing up for moving, instead of which, there she was actually waiting on—a cheat!

"Thank you, Aunt Mattie," gulped the girl among the pillows. "I didn't want you to go to all this trouble." How utterly stingy that sounded.

"There, there, darling," and the warm lips pressed that guilty little brow, "you know *I love* to do things for my—baby."

Oh, if she only had not said—*baby!*

CHAPTER VIII

IT SEEMED LONG AGO

SHE lay there, first sobbing, then pitying herself and finally she heard the voices below. They had been talking about the fire, when Tom had found her. They didn't know, and she did not want them to know, what cruel gossipy little Sally Freeman had told her. For Sally had said that she didn't belong to anybody, that she wasn't even adopted by Tom and Martha Potter. That they had just taken her in! It was this that had so crushed poor Tony. She felt like a waif: like something swept in by the great ocean's tide, like a poor little chip that couldn't save itself among the driftwood, unless it were rescued.

The voices came up from down stairs. She heard her name spoken repeatedly, although she was not listening. Finally she heard a sentence that gave her a start.

"Do you suppose," Tom was saying to Mattie, "that we should send her away to school?"

"Why should we do that?" Mattie asked quickly.

"To do our best by her. She's all we've got and——"

Away to school! Tony could hardly believe her ears. She sat up, frightened. She wouldn't go away to school. She listened; heard Mattie answer Tom:

"But what about us? We will get old some day," she was saying. Tom was younger than Mattie.

"Yes, of course," Tom drawled, as he always did when he hated to say something that had to be said. "But if we do all we can for little Tony perhaps we'll have *her* with us when we're old."

Tony gasped. Poor Tom! He wanted to be sure he would have her with him when he grew old! And she had been mean today of all days, when these two dear people had been so busy and were even worried about her!

Guilt, the kind Tony had never known of before, came upon her like a huge blanket trying to smother her. Oh, why had she pretended she was sick? Martha even thought she had been hurt, and she was only making believe. How could she have been so horrid to Aunt Mattie?

She could not help hearing the conversation going on in the dining-room, for it seemed to surround her in clouds, weirdly stealing up

through that heat register, and each sentence she heard made her feel worse.

They were talking about money. Could they spare enough to give Tony a complete new outfit and then to send her to a boarding school?

"But I wouldn't go," she was protesting almost aloud. "I'd hate a boarding school."

"Tom," she heard Martha say next, "don't you think we ought to make some effort to find her folks? They can't all have gone abroad. And Jessie always liked Tony's mother, her sister Mary."

Her folks! Tony stepped out of bed, crept over the board that creaked without touching it, and bent over the register.

"Yes," Tom answered Martha, "I know Mary intended to see—Jessie——" He stopped suddenly as he mentioned that name. His voice seemed to break on it, to quaver like—like—oh, there was something sad about it.

"Jessie!" Tony brushed her hand to her lips holding the words back. "My—Aunt Jessie! Sally Freeman said—I wasn't anybody's——" She choked on the very thought of that word. To belong to nobody! To have been taken care of by—strangers!

But there were Tom and Martha so near to her, so dear to her, and they were talking

about her very own folks. They loved her. They were planning for her, and her Daddy-Tom had taken her, a baby, from her own mother's arms. Martha had only lately told her that, and it was so unreal somehow she couldn't quite realize it all, even yet.

"Dear Daddy-Tom," she now sighed, settling back on her turned up heels. "And he used to tell me I rode in from the far, far away ocean, on a mermaid's back!"

The voices below were trailing off. No, Mattie was saying something more about her —folks.

Then Tom got up from his chair; she heard it spring back as it always did when he got out of it. He was saying something very, very low.

Should she be listening? Was she doing something else wrong?

Just then Tom spoke louder, at least she was not leaning over listening and yet she heard him. She could not help hearing him. He was talking about her folks.

"I didn't tell you, Mattie," he was saying, "you know you were in Boston when—it happened;" he paused before he said "it happened." Then he went on slowly, so slowly Tony wondered why he found it so hard to talk about her folks.

"I didn't take little Antoinette Winters," (that was Tony) he said presently, "until I had written to her folks."

"Did they answer?" Martha asked him, eagerly.

"Yes." Why didn't he go on? Then: "I had a letter from—Jessie."

"From Jessie?" Even Martha seemed to think Jessie was somebody wonderful, according to the way she repeated the name, thought Tony. But maybe she should not hear all this! Yet it was about *her* and *her folks.*

"Jessie said a lot about my having saved the baby, of course," Tom was continuing, his voice depreciating the evident praise he had received in that letter, "and she insisted no one could do better by the baby than I might do, with you, of course. She had taken it for granted that you were home," he explained. "But Laura Applegate——"

"Yes, Laura knows more about babies than I do," Martha interrupted modestly.

"It wasn't that, Martha." Tony could not help listening now. Why had she been living with Aunt Laura Applegate before she came to live——

"The real reason why I didn't take the baby home at first," the man below was saying, "was because I didn't want to interfere with

your plans, Martha. You were studying in Boston."

"But if you needed me, Tom." That was just like Martha.

"Yes, but *I* didn't. After all Mary Winters' baby is no *relation* to us, she just seems like some precious little thing we've found!" The big man was trying to say something and to hide something else. Even Tony understood how he hated silliness.

"You were wise, Tom; wiser than I could have been. Laura Applegate was always a born nurse."

"Yes, I knew that." One would think they were talking right in her room, the words came up so clearly, because the night was quiet. Still Tony wondered; should she be listening? She was fascinated but——

"Well, anyhow," Tom spoke again, "Jessie asked me to take the baby because she couldn't."

"Why?" asked Martha, and Tony would have asked the same question had she a chance, she was so eager to know.

"Because she's some sort of an invalid, I don't just know," stumbled Tom. Why was he always like that when he spoke of Jessie? Did he love her? "At any rate," and Tony could hear him draw a long, full breath, "I

wanted that little girl. I always liked Ed Winters," (that was Tony's own father and how she loved to hear Tom speak so of him!) "and I'd do anything I could for him. He gave up his life for another, and if he had been in our service the good old U.S.A. would have looked out for his little girl!"

"Oh!" breathed Tony, now in her bed again, "how lovely to hear *him* say that. He's a life saver and so was my own daddy! And that's why Daddy-Tom *is* my ownest father now." She hugged the pillow because she couldn't hug her Daddy-Tom. But oh, how she did love him! How noble he was! And how—how loyal to those who were brave!

"But I—I was a coward today," came the accusing thought. "And I made *him* worry, and I worried dear Aunt Mattie!" That awful feeling of unworthiness was her punishment now. To have been mean to those two darlings.

Their voices had died down. They would soon be coming upstairs. But tomorrow *she* would work. She would pack Daddy-Tom's trunk—he had left it till the last—and she would be careful to put piles and piles of the finest paper around each of the gold-rimmed

dishes; they were still to be packed. And her old bicycle, that would be so much trouble to crate, she would give that to Sally, she wouldn't have Daddy-Tom bother with it all. She forgave Sally completely for it was all lovely now.

These good resolutions somewhat nullified that awful feeling of guilt, at least while she was thinking of what she would do to help with the moving she could forget what she hadn't done today. She wished now that the heater register had been closed, and that she had not heard all those secrets. The new knowledge was a new responsibility.

Should she tell? Should she be brave enough now to tell that she *had* heard?

"I would and could," was her secret reply to the secret question, "but then, perhaps it would bother them more, especially that part about Jessie. There must be some secret in that. Yes, there must be some reason why every one stumbled over the name Jessie," Tony privately decided, "and I know Daddy-Tom must have loved her."

"And it's a horrid name, I never could like an aunt with that name and I hope she'll never find me, even if she wants to, which she doesn't,—I suppose," ran on the thoughts that

crowded into Tony's head so fast it almost ached with them. "Because she must have gone away from Daddy-Tom.

"And it would serve me right if I did get a black, blinding headache," she charged herself anew, "for I made believe today and that always tells, like cheating," she concluded, just as the voices down stairs floated upwards again.

"I am so glad we are going away from here, Tom," Martha said, sort of dully.

"But this has been like home except, that a government man never really has a home," her brother replied.

"I know. Of course we have good friends here and all that, but there are no chances for girls here, Tom. Why, Tony hardly has any girl friends in winter," Martha pointed out, as if they should move for a little thing like that, when there were Sally Freeman and at least six nice boys to play with, and even if they were boys they were good fun, Tony told herself.

After that the voices droned off into uninteresting plans, and they only spoke out real loud when some new point was touched upon.

Then there was no more talk; they had gone out into the kitchen. For a while the girl on the bed lay there wondering. Should she

care about being "no relation?" She didn't, she couldn't, it was all right, lovely with Daddy-Tom and Aunt Mattie. Why weren't they just as good and better than Sally's mother and father who never let her do the things she wanted to do, and who made her grow up into a 'fraid' cat?

This was no question at all to Tony, for the answer rang out from everything within her that could answer.

She knew what she'd do! She'd adopt *them!* She'd make *them* her mother and father! And in the new place that would be perfect!

In her joyous excitement she wanted to call out the glad news, but as she turned to look towards the door she saw something!

"Oh, what is that?" she said aloud but in a thin, scared voice. "What is that horrid thing over on the stand! Oh!" she was crying out. "Oh, it looks like—a boxing—glove!"

But she didn't want to see a boxing glove. It frightened her after the awful time she had had with the one she had borrowed. No, no, she didn't even want to think of a boxing glove!

CHAPTER IX

WHEN A GREAT THING HAPPENED

WHEN she stopped screaming she was in her Aunt Mattie's arms.

"Oh!" she panted. "Oh, dear! What was it? It looked just like Caleb's old—old—boxing glove!"

"Boxing glove!" repeated the astonished Martha. "Why, dear child, that was nothing but your cap, your tam o'shanter. You just had it hanging there on the post of the stand," went on the perplexed woman, who was trying to tell Tom, who stood by the door anxiously, that it was all right, and Tony was only having a little night-mare about a boxing glove.

"But I wasn't asleep at all," Tony was insisting, determined this time there would be no mix-up. She wasn't sick and she wasn't asleep and she didn't have the night-mare. She told them so, very emphatically.

"Then why should you be afraid of a boxing glove?" asked Martha, in genuine astonishment.

"Oh, because, because I hate them," wailed Tony. "They made trouble for us—all! Daddy-Tom doesn't like them and I'm—I'm a cheat!"

Such an outburst followed this confession that even Martha, accustomed to girls' high-strung ways, was too surprised to speak. She just stood there, while Tom took his little Tony in his big, strong arms.

"I know, Puss," he murmured into her ear, the one that wasn't buried in his sweater collar, "I know about the old boxing gloves. But don't worry any more about them. They gave you a lot of good exercise, and a growing girl like you"—he was raising his voice to lift the emphasis off the unpleasant remembrance, —"a growing girl like you needs a lot of exercise," he insisted. "Look at that muscle!" He was feeling for muscle spots in her firm young arms. "That's pretty good, Tony. Lots of boys at your age——"

"But please don't go on pretending any more," Tony begged pitifully. "I can't stand it. I wasn't a bit sick today," she blurted out. "And I didn't fall down the loft. I only made believe. Just to—to make you—worry!" It was hard to say all that—but she had to say it. She couldn't stand not saying it a minute longer.

"Now there, there. That's all right, Tony," Tom told her repeatedly. "We know. That's all right. And when we move you are going to have a better room than this——"

"I don't want it. This is a lovely room. And I don't want to go to boarding school. I heard—what you said. I wasn't asleep——"

"You heard *all* we said, Tony?" asked Martha, a little anxiously.

"Maybe not all, but I heard about boarding school," the girl replied, "and I wouldn't really, I couldn't go, ever," she protested, sitting up straight to do so, and gulping down all the smothery little sobs that kept coming up her throat.

"You don't ever have to go," the man's voice assured her. "But see here," and he tipped his head to aim his eye side-ways at her as he always did to speak very positively, "if you don't lie down and get some sleep we won't have any helper with all the packing tomorrow."

"Do lie down, dear," urged Martha, who had been letting her brother do the talking for a while.

"But I'm all right," and Tony flung out both her arms to prove it. "And I'll never get to sleep if you don't *listen!*"

"We're listening," answered Tom drolly.

"Then, it's this. I mean I want to say this. I want to adopt you both as my father and mother so that no one else can ever, ever claim me."

"Adopt us!" both exclaimed in one, clear voice.

"Yes. I want to call you Daddy without the Tom, and I don't want Aunt Mattie to be Aunt Mattie——"

"But you see, Tony duckie," Tom interrupted, "it's awful mixed up. Since this lady here is my sister and you are going to adopt me as your daddy, you have got to adopt her as your Auntie; haven't you?"

"Oh, yes," said Tony, sadly. She hadn't thought of that. She had wanted Mattie to be her mother, but she couldn't be, of course.

Lovely, big, comfortable Martha, wearing a nice, light wash dress even in the busy packing time, just stood there glowing with satisfaction. Everything Tony said or did seemed smart to Martha.

"You are right, Tony," she said finally, "you should adopt *us*. We have been waiting; your mother's folks might have claimed you or——"

"They couldn't. I wouldn't let them. I don't want them, Jessie neither!" She exploded the name as if it were quite as hard for

her to utter as it had been for every one else.

"What do you know—about Jessie?" Tom asked very evenly. His blue eyes were following the stream of light from her bed-lamp that seemed to flood into Tony's own eyes.

"Nothing; I don't want to know anything. But you liked my father, didn't you, Daddy?" There! She had said daddy all alone, without the "Tom," and it sounded just as natural as if she had been saying it all her life.

"Yes, Tony. Your father was a fine boy," said Tom seriously. "And, you see, he was something of a cousin of ours, so——"

"Oh, then you *are* related to me!" she cried out gladly. She *did* want relations after all.

"Yes, oh yes," Martha replied quickly. "The Potters and Winters are all related, distantly."

"Mattie, this child has got to get to sleep," Tom insisted. "It's all hours——"

"Oh, I feel all right now," sighed Tony, thus admitting she had not been *quite* all right before. "And I'm not going to move my old bicycle, Daddy. I'm going to give it to Sally Freeman."

"That's a splendid idea," agreed Martha promptly, showing how glad she was to hear Tony say so. "You can get a nice new one for your next birthday."

"Then, you are both adopted to me now, aren't you?" Tony asked anxiously, determined to make sure of that one important point.

"Pos-i-tive-ly!" spaced out the new daddy, syllable by syllable.

"Certainly," replied the capable Aunt Mattie, straightening up to do so.

"And no matter what anyone says, ever, they can't be my boss? No one else but just us?" Tony further demanded to know.

"Just us," agreed Tom. "We'll be plenty, Tony. And now, you just get to snoozing. I don't want a sick—little daughter to move to New Jersey," he said quite gaily, keeping up with her mood and confirming the queer sort of adoption.

"All right, Daddy," Tony said. "And I'll never try any old boxing gloves again. I'll learn to sew," she promised rashly, for she might know she would hate to learn anything like sewing.

Even after they had kissed her good-night with a new sort of fondness, and Tom had promised her a fine new bicycle with a coaster-brake, when they would get to New Jersey, and Martha had tucked her in and turned out the light and cautioned her to sleep as late as she wanted to in the morning, in spite of all

there was to do in the morning—even then the excited Tony couldn't get to sleep.

But how much better she felt! All that mean, guilty feeling was gone. And now it was all settled. She just belonged to Tom and Martha, and even her Aunt Laura Applegate who had been so good to her, after all, she had only been a nurse *hired* by Tom Potter!

Whoever this Jessie was she, Tony, was not going to have anything ever to do with her. Unless—she might find her for Daddy-Tom!

Wasn't that a wonderful idea! To solve the mystery of Jessie and make her, just make her love——

Then she giggled. How silly. As if a little girl could make anybody love somebody else.

"Well, anyhow," she concluded, sleep beginning to claim its rights, "I've got to be really Tony Potter. And those Weaver folks —Jessie Weaver," she sneered as she thought of that name, "they won't know who I am, if they ever try to find out, which they won't."

But she was going to find out about Jessie Weaver. That mystery was too plainly a mystery, and one that seemed to concern herself, for Tony to ignore it. Maybe Jessie Weaver was a princess or if not a princess, maybe she was very beautiful, or very rich, or even very ugly; anything that made her different from

other folks. She must be that, because whenever anyone mentioned her name they choked on it, and Tom Potter stuttered over it and he never stuttered over anything else. How could Tony know then what a wonderful time she was going to have solving the mystery of Jessie?

Bit by bit all these details were asserting themselves for Tony's consideration, although they had chosen an inopportune time, for it was late, she was tired, and she was determined to do a lot of work next day. She was bound to be a credit to her newly adopted folks, and so she just had to get to sleep right away.

"Jessie, Jessie Weaver!" That name kept buzzing in her rebellious ears. What did she care about her aunt Jessie Weaver? Her lovely mother was Mary Winters, who had been taken away in that terrible fire, and whose picture was found in the trunk the firemen had saved from her own home the night it had been burned. Her mother had had the trunk packed all ready to go away—maybe to this sister, Jessie Weaver. But now the picture was all Tony had to know her mother by. Martha had it framed and it always stood on Tony's bureau, but, of course, it was packed up now, and was going to stand on the new

room bureau when they got to New Jersey.

How she wondered then what New Jersey would be like? Everything would be different there. Tony half dreamed of queer places and queer girls and boys, and she could think clearly enough, as she was dozing off to sleep, that whatever she did she was going to try not to be rough and tom-boyish, as she had been always.

Down in the kitchen doing a few more little but important things, like unscrewing the coffee mill—Tom was doing that, and tying up two hat boxes—Mattie was doing that; the two Potters were talking but there was no danger of Antoinette Potter hearing them.

"I *will* adopt her now," Tom said after discussing the novel method Tony had followed in adopting them. "I've been intending to get the papers out, in fact I have them partly prepared."

"But are you sure the Weavers won't mind?" Martha being a woman suspected that the other woman, Jessie Weaver, wherever she was, might some day change her mind about her sister's child and come to claim her.

"That's what I had been waiting for," Tom explained crisply. "I wrote Jessie; she's been sick and in Europe, just came back and she

wrote me only last week. She's willing."

"Doesn't she ever want to see the little girl? That seems unnatural," Martha ventured, although she knew she was on dangerous ground in prolonging the conversation.

"I didn't ask her that," said Tom sharply, and he dropped his hammer with a clang, right into a box where tin pans chimed out like tin bells when the hammer hit them.

Martha did not press the subject. She knew enough about Jessie Weaver to understand that she might be queer about her sister Mary's little girl. She remembered Jessie Weaver. She had come to the big hotel fifteen years ago, when Tom was wearing the white uniform of the Naval Service. She was a pretty girl, very pretty. Martha would never forget how she and Tom looked one day when Tom took her out sailing. She was a blonde and wore a flaming red sailor suit, like a little girl's, with the short skirt and a blouse with white anchors and stars on the upper sleeve. She had on a cap, too, a white fatigue cap with the leather visor and the stars and anchor embroidered to match the blouse.

Going off with handsome young Tom, in his natty white uniform, they made a picture that more persons than Tom's sister were apt to remember.

And Tom was very handsome then. Martha almost stopped tying the hatbox now as she recalled his clear skin, wonderful blue eyes, and that curl his thick brown hair always got tangled into. But Jessie Weaver went away from the hotel shortly after that, and Tom never talked about her again, not even to Martha.

It had been his one romance, no one knew that better than his sister did, and it was stranger than a story, that after those years of loneliness, which not even the good comradeship of his fellow guardsmen could really penetrate, here was Tom, actually being adopted as father to Jessie Weaver's sister's child.

Surely that was stranger than fiction, and with Tony developing into the venturesome spirit she could never possibly entirely repress, there was no guessing what might happen next.

"But you are right, Tom, about adopting Tony legally," Martha spoke again, just as they prepared to turn out all the down-stairs lights. "How in the world could that child legally belong to any one else but you?"

"I don't know," said Tom dryly, "but I'm going to make sure she can't."

"And don't bother about any more of the

little things, we can easily pack them," his sister generously offered. "Tony is real good at it when she stands still long enough."

"Oh, I'll have more time tomorrow afternoon——"

"But you've got to come home early and dress if they have the supper at the fire-house at half-past six."

"It won't take me long to dress. I wish they wouldn't bother. It's all nonsense," he protested, showing how he hated to think of the fuss the men were going to make over him at their farewell supper.

"It will be something to remember," Martha replied to that, a little wearily, for she had had a long busy day, even if Mrs. Burke had helped her for three hours in the afternoon.

"We're not likely to forget Duneslay," said Tom, taking the small pitcher of drinking water from his sister's hands as he stepped aside to let her pass before him up the stairs. "I'll be home early, tomorrow," he said in a low voice, and the promise meant that he would come home as early as he could, to help with the endless ends of all packings, when anyone attempts to move a home.

A new little Tony was sleeping soundly then.

CHAPTER X

CEDAR AND ROSEBUDS

ALL of this must be told if the story of Two Girls of Today is to be fully understood. Because Tony was so different from other girls, it is reasonable to ask why. How could she do such queer things when she met Ted, the girl we knew better in our first volume: A Girl Called Ted? The mystery of Jessie Weaver and what Tom's romance meant began back in Cape Cod, so to follow it up also the story had to be told from there.

A wonderful hero was Tom, so his romance must have been wonderful too. Young as she was down there in Cape Cod, the jolly little Tony suspected that, and now up in New Jersey she was already working on that same mystery actually without her knowing it. And Ted, the invincible, was helping her. Ted the girl who opened the wayside stand and was determined to make it pay, because some one dear to her needed that money.

So the two girls of today were working out the problems in a most unusual way. A way,

however, not quite so strange because today's girls are brave, and fearless, and full of energy. If only they work for a noble cause there is little danger of anything being done that is not noble in itself. One more episode of Tony's early childhood journey and our story will then hurry along. But the journey from Cape Cod to New Jersey cannot be entirely overlooked.

It was the morning after her bad dream, but even before Tony had opened her dark eyes she could feel the difference.

"Like somebody whistling," she thought, recognizing the sensation of happiness that permeated her so completely she could feel its warm flood all over her, without realizing just what it meant. Tony likened her joy to "somebody whistling," but most girls would have said, "like bells ringing or birds singing," but then, Tony had played a lot with boys.

She was remembering how lovely it had been when she found out she was really somebody, and not nobody, like Sally had said.

"Yep-pee!" she exclaimed aloud, jumping up and throwing her arms out dangerously. "I'm Tony Potter now, and I've got a real daddy and a realerest Aunt Mattie. I could call her Motzie, I like that kind of queer

name," this was being thought out, not spoken, "but maybe she wouldn't like Motzie. I do; I love it. I'll ask her. We ought *all* to have new names for the new place, although I suppose New Jersey isn't anything like as important a state as our big old Massachusetts. I know it isn't. Look at the fish we catch here on the Cape."

As if the Cape Cod fish could compare with the New Jersey oysters—speaking of fish, which after all is a very small article and of minor importance compared with all the other wonders of both states.

But Tony was loyal, and if Cape Cod meant good fish she insisted upon the fish getting due credit.

How upset everything was! Her room was bare except for the bed and bureau and stand, and these would not be moved. Tom insisted upon a lot of new furniture for the New Jersey house, as he said they needed new things, and besides, it would cost a lot to crate things and ship them all that distance.

A Salem chest of drawers had been bought from Martha for one hundred dollars, and she was not sorry to part with it. True, it was a genuine antique, but it was old and gloomy, and Tom said antique furniture always reminded him of a bus ride along some

important drive, where the bus man kept calling out whose were the houses and who were the people.

"When you have old furniture," he told Martha, "it's just like that. You just have to keep calling out all the time how old they are!"

So all the old stuff was sold, and the prices received were so satisfactory that it looked as if the new articles, to be bought in place of them, would be very interesting also. Tony's bedroom set at Duneslay was of old maple, that lovely golden striped wood found among the early American pieces, and the older it got the more satiny the finish became.

"But a pretty white enameled set," Martha was promising Tony, "like that one in the big Boston house; that would be lovely for your room. With a cute little dressing table——"

"I think I'd like a desk better than a dressing table," Tony had then replied. But that was before she reformed and decided to be a girlish girl instead of a boyish girl. Maybe she would want the dressing table now.

One more day in Duneslay! Then the journey and the great mysterious unknown adventures of a brand new place, even a brand new state!

Tony was hardly dressed next morning, in

fact she had one more shoe to tie, when Sally's call reminded her of the bicycle she was going to give her chum.

"Just a minute, Sally!" she called down, unmindful that Martha was telling the same girl that Tony hadn't yet had her breakfast. Giving a quick look in the old glass they were not taking, and a pat to one unruly curl on top of her head, Tony hurried down, and was telling Sally about the bicycle before Martha had a chance to caution Tony not to go out now, to be sure not to, without eating her oatmeal.

"You didn't eat any supper last night, dear," the motherly one reminded her, "and you must eat every meal now or you won't enjoy the trip. "You'll be having——"

"I don't have anything but emptiness from not eating, Motzie," said Tony gaily, "and emptiness doesn't hurt—much."

"Oh, you're awfully good to give me your bike, Tony," Sally managed to say now. "And I need it too. Look how far I have to walk to school."

"But that isn't why I gave it to you, Sal," Tony rejoined frankly. "I just didn't want my daddy to bother crating it."

"Oh," said Sally caring little about the

reasons, it being merely the bike that counted to her.

"You two little girls will be sorry to leave each other, won't you?" prompted Martha, wondering why children were so enormously selfish.

"Yes m'm," said Sally indifferently, for the bicycle was right there on the little side porch and Sally was already looking it over with a proprietory air. She had wanted a wheel for so long, but her folks were very saving, and expected to paint their house before they rented it out the next summer, so they didn't even think of bicycles.

"Perhaps you better take it along now, Sally," Martha suggested, being anxious to get Tony in line with her breakfast. "We are going to finish packing this morning. Tony will be out this afternoon, Sally." That was a broad hint. "She will have to say good-bye to everyone today, because we won't have any time to spare tomorrow," finished Martha good-naturedly.

"Yes m'm," Sally said to that also, and even Tony then decided her friend had better take the wheel home and be done with it, so she, being much quicker and stronger than little Sally, just bumpted it down the porch steps

and started the new owner off on it with a violent shove.

"See you s'after!" she called merrily after the girl peddling the wheel, which as every girl knows is every girl's way of saying, she would see a friend "this afternoon."

Back in the kitchen again Tony went right at the oatmeal. She wanted to say things to Martha, to tell her she was going to call her Motzie, like she used to when she was a real little girl, to tell her about wanting to be a grown up girl now instead of a tomboy. But somehow they had talked so much last night she didn't feel inclined to take up that sentimental subject again. It would seem silly, and Tony hated silliness as much as Tom did.

"I want to pack daddy's trunk, can't I?" she asked Martha, a little shyly, donning the big bungalow apron she knew she had to don to work around the house.

"Why yes; I guess you can, Tony," assented Martha. "His clothes are all folded—be careful not to make a single crease in any of them. Well, let me see," she demurred. "Suppose I put the big things in the bottom of the trunk so they won't get mussed, and you can arrange the small things. But don't upset anything; there's his collar box. We'll

have to put the collars in a hat and pack the box inside a lamp shade, I guess," the capable Martha continued to suggest and direct. "Look out for his papers; they must be tied in one of his old handkerchiefs."

Gaily Tony set to work. She loved to do things for her daddy. His clothes were always so smooth and important looking. Martha put in his two blue life-saver suits —they would do for the police uniform, maybe.

"Won't he make a wonderful policeman?" Tony could not help saying, as the brass buttons of his coast guard uniform shone out upon the dark blue coat.

"Yes, Tom is just the man for the United States Service," Martha replied proudly. "Ever since he was a little boy, when he carried the flag in the Fourth of July parade, we knew he would join. First, you know, dear, he was in the navy."

"Oh, I'll bet he looked fine in Navy uniform," broke in Tony enthusiastically.

"He did."

Queer how short Martha stopped then. Tony remembered something said before about his being such a handsome young sailor, and about that Jessie. Oh, well, he was going

to be a state policeman now, and he would look just as well in *that* uniform, Tony was positive.

She packed on, singing a little, humming a little and even whistling a little, for Tony could whistle,—she was Tony when she whistled and Antoinette when she sang, by some queer little shift of an elfin mood the wonderful change would be made.

Everything was lovely today; all the gloom had gone by with last night's troubles, exactly as a storm blows over and leaves the world all clean and fresh and beautiful.

But suddenly she lost track of everything Martha was saying and all this recollecting brings out a clue to her Jessie mystery. She had found among her daddy's things, a little package of letters, tied up with a bright red ribbon, and folded in a piece of tissue paper, right on top of the packet of letters, was something like withered flowers!

She knew at once that these were love letters! And she knew without unfolding that piece of torn tissue paper, that the flowers treasured there were her hero's love flowers!

"Oh," she almost sighed aloud, "why couldn't he have had everything—whatever everything might have been for him—come

true! Why are his flowers all dried up and withered?"

She would put a nice fresh piece of paper around them, she instantly decided, but she must keep his secret. He must never know that *she* knew. Not even Martha must know this, for it was plainly *his* secret. The package had been all wrapped up in an old white sailor blouse, one that he must have worn when he was a jolly sailor lad, and went a-courting Jessie. How thrilling to even touch such romance!

Tony scarcely breathed as she let the yellow paper fall from around the flowers. She was so glad Martha wasn't looking, that she had gone down in the cellar for something.

The flowers! Pieces of cedar not quite brown but no longer green, and a dark, almost black, small rose! The stem was dry and threatened to crack, but these were her own daddy's, and Tony was not letting a single dry speck fall. She had snatched up a nice, fresh, clean piece of white paper, the kind they had been wrapping the glassware in, and in this she quickly but tenderly folded away again Tom Potter's treasure.

"Cedar and roses!" thought Tony, "with mostly cedar. I'll never forget that." That

was why she became excited so much later when she saw a car driving through New Jersey with cedar sticking out the sides.

She was excited now when Martha came back, but she managed to hide it and appear to be busy patting in the very last of the neckties, and the socks that Martha warned her to leave on top, although she had already left out as many as a half dozen pairs to put in the bags because all the trunks were sure to be delayed, Martha feared.

But Tony could think of nothing but that little sad package of letters, with the narrow red ribbon string, and the faded rose resting in a grave of cedar!

"It's just that," she was concluding, "a little grave with evergreen trees on it, and I know it is the grave of his love!"

This was the first time in her life that Tony had encountered Romance. And it seemed to her she could see Tom's heart bleeding! She could hardly stand the thought of his disappointment, for she knew how generous he must always have been. And how worthy.

"I'm glad I'm his daughter now," she was musing determinedly. "And I'm glad I've changed my name. I never want to have anything to do with Jessie Weaver, unless I get a chance to bring her back to him." How lit-

tle she knew then about the chance that was sure to come later!

This was it, she knew it now. Her Aunt Jessie Weaver was the girl who wore red ribbons and wrote thick letters and put cedar with rose buds!

Well, he would never miss her any more, if he ever did now, for Tony would make up to him for all he must have suffered. She would do everything she knew he would want her to do, and she would even learn to sew—she could learn to darn his socks, maybe, and *that* ought to count, for Martha had lots else to do.

"All finished?" the voice beside her rather startled her, she had been so buried with his lost love story.

"Yes, just finished," Tony managed to say, jumping up to take a last critical look and to slip a couple of books in the trunk at the side of the clothes, where there was plenty of room for flat books but not a bit of room for anything else.

"Your daddy will be so pleased, dear," Mattie told her. "You have done that beautifully."

"I'm glad," was all this romantic girl, who hardly recognized her down feelings as being hers, was able to say.

His trunk was packed.

CHAPTER XI

QUEER CUSTOMERS

AND this was the same Tony who was now actually living in New Jersey and having a really fine time with Major the horse; she had such a weakness for adopting folks that she adopted Major the minute she laid her eyes on him. And the Potters were living in a quaint old house, nothing like the house Martha had expected to have in the strange sea-shore town. But getting there in early spring, they found all the best places already rented for the summer, so this old place, with Major and his cart in the bargain, attracted Tony so strongly that Mattie gave in and rented it.

Of course Tom had really paid something, a very little price for the farm equipment, and that meant some rusty old garden tools, which the Potters would have no use for, and rusty old Major that Tony had a whole lot of use for. Then, there were the loveliest cedar trees about the whole place, and Tony suspected Tom of liking to live near cedar

trees. She remembered how sorry he was to leave their lovely old tree at Cape Cod, and she certainly couldn't forget finding the cedar and rosebud letter just before they moved.

She wanted to tell the story to Ted and felt, somehow, that Ted would help her bring this mysterious Jessie Weaver back to Tom. Jessie was Tony's aunt, of that she was positive, and she had been Tom's sweetheart; she was equally positive of that. And because Tony wanted to do everything she could to make her Daddy-Tom happy, she had decided, in her own peculiar way, that the thing to do was to find this Jessie, who was, as Mattie had said, such a pretty girl, years and years ago. What, wondered Tony, could she possibly be like now? And where on earth did she live or hide or wander?

There was something about their moving to New Jersey from Cape Cod that gave Tony a feeling of being hot on the trail; hot the way girls would call out in a game when someone almost touched the right thing when blindfolded. Yes, Tony was moving along, unseeing, as it were, because she couldn't think of such a thing as even mentioning Jessie to Tom, and she could barely mention the name to Martha.

It was now another lovely morning in early

summer, and Tony was already over to the wayside stand where Ted was busy shining up glasses hopefully, putting little paper doilies under the new candy jars and making the place look as pretty, and neat, and attractive as any wayside stand could expect to look.

"Seen Bumpy lately?" Tony asked, as she polished off a California apple and put it alongside a Florida orange just for contrast.

"No, I haven't," answered Ted. "But I'd like to. Didn't he promise you a new kitten or something?"

"Kitten! Dog you mean. But I'm not sure Major would like a dog. He's sort of choosey." Tony found a beautifully green apple and set that down to pair with the first: "How do we look?" she asked, standing off as far as the counter would give her room to take a slanting look at the shelf she was busy with.

"If you ask me," drawled Ted, "I think we look simply great! But where, oh where, are the customers?"

"They may all come together in a gorgeous airship," joked Tony, "although the landing might be a little risky. But look, Ted! Just look! Here comes the chariot. Grab off this apron——"

The apron was clinging fast to Tony's neck

by way of a twisted string, that should have been somewhere else but wasn't. But with a good jerk Ted broke the unruly string, and the way Tony squealed one would have thought she had broken her neck along with it. An apron string can hurt when it's pulled too hard.

Ted herself was anxiously straightening out her own attire, for her Hoover dress-apron could get a little twisted too, but not as badly as an apron string. The car was up alongside the stand now, the same curiously made up auto that looked like a little houseboat on wheels.

"Good morning, girls!" sang out the same soft, velvety voice that both girls recognized as belonging to Bumpy's queen. "Have we any very nice melons this morning?"

"Oh, yes, Miss Warner, I have a few lovely ones," quickly replied the business-like Ted, moving to that part of her market where the melons were in the shade, and she hoped nice and cool.

"Miss Warner?" repeated the voice from the car, pleasantly. "Well, that isn't exactly my name——"

Ted was ready to apologize for her mistake, but the lady she had called Warner just laughed it off.

"It's as good a name as any, perhaps," she interrupted Ted's attempt: "And as to names; what do they matter?"

Tony had been standing there, gaping rather stupidly, she feared, but waiting to hear the lady say what her name really was. But she was disappointed, for Ted was fixing up the basket now, and the name was entirely forgotten in the business of selecting the best fruits.

Tony saw that the car curtains were not now tightly drawn, as they had been before, and she also saw that Bumpy's Queen was no longer veiled.

"The mask is off," Tony was telling herself secretly, "and the car doesn't look like a gypsy wagon now."

"And here is your little friend who is not afraid of dogs," the voice was saying, "My poor Bilge! He is sick today——"

"Oh that's too bad," spoke up the almost tongue-tied Tony.

"Yes. I'm afraid our friend Felix was too good to him and fed him not wisely but too well. Bilge has a very bad spell of indigestion."

"Felix?" Tony repeated to Ted, as she helped count out the oranges.

"That's Bumpy," said Ted aside.

But when Tony brought the little paste-

board box with part of the order out to the car, she could not help staring into the face she had already believed mysterious. It was indeed an unusual face, the eyes were large and still brilliant although the woman was by no means young, and her skin was velvety with a real dewiness—surely it was skin unused to artificial touches. But it was that smile, that peculiarly attractive expression about the mouth, that Tony felt so irresistible.

"Beautiful," Tony thought. "I've always called her the Beautiful Lady."

But the soft voice was saying pleasant things to Tony, and Tony felt stupid indeed making her commonplace replies. Altogether she felt exactly as she did the day she found Tom's love letters tied with the little bright ribbon. It was as if something she couldn't give name to had suddenly seized upon her mind and crowded out all sensible, practical thoughts.

"Did you get the parsley, Tony?" Ted was asking her, and that brought her back to earth again, for Ted was bound to serve her customers with promptness and courtesy, and Tony was doing nothing of the kind.

But she got the parsley, a beautiful green bunch, and when she handed it into the car, the hand that took it suddenly grasped hers.

"You're a darling girl," said the velvety voice, "and so is Ted. I wonder why you have both taken boys' names?"

"Oh, we didn't take them, really, that is, they were wished on us," laughed Tony, a little embarrassed by the hand squeeze. "We had such silly long names——"

"Then you are to call me Jesse. I always admired big men of the Western kind, and I'd like to have a man's name to match up with your boys' names. There were men in the West called Jess, I remember."

"Just Jess?" repeated Tony, her heart giving a little thump when she remembered the other Jessie, she was bound to be looking out for. "Miss Jess?" she asked awkwardly.

"Well, I suppose you would rather consider me an old lady——"

"No indeed," sang out Ted, a little anxious lest Tony should not be customer wise, and that she might talk too much. "We know the difference between young ladies and old ladies——"

"Now, now," interrupted the car driver. "I'm old enough to be your auntie, so you may call me Aunt Jess. How would you like that?"

"We'd love it," Ted declared, thinking maybe this woman was a little queer after all.

"And now, Aunt Jess," she said laughingly, "won't you have some perfectly delicious home grown raspberries?"

"Aunt Jess!" Tony was saying that under her breath. What a queer thing to meet a strange woman this way, who called herself Aunt Jess? It was because of the boys' names they had taken, of course, but it made her feel queer just the same.

"I would like some fresh things tomorrow morning but I shan't have time to come for them——"

"I can deliver them," Tony said then, glad to give old Major a chance to share in the stand business. "I have an old horse and a cart."

Ted took the order for the next day, writing it down carefully, and putting substitutes alongside of certain berries and fruits which the big market could never be sure of having on hand. Then Aunt Jess drove off, her face as beautiful as any either girl had ever seen pictured in their most romantic novels, and when she was gone Ted grabbed Tony around the waist and did a silly little dance.

"Isn't that just great?" she puffed into Tony's ear.

"What?" asked Tony, trying to avoid knocking over a pan of water.

"Why, didn't you see? She's really adopting you!"

Tony dropped Ted's hands and her smile instantly vanished.

"Don't say that, Ted, please," she murmured seriously, "I can't bear to—hear anything about—adoption."

"Oh, Tony dear, I'm so sorry," Ted assured her, her own face at once serious and sympathetic. "I forgot. But then," she went on, determined not to let Tony feel like an orphan, *"I'm* not much different."

"Your father is living——"

"Yes and he is a darling." Ted admitted loyally. "But you've got an uncle who is just as good as any father I ever saw."

"Oh, of course," and Tony swung back into her livelier mood. "I know that. You can't beat my Daddy-Tom, and I wouldn't change him for anyone in the world. It isn't that. But when you said that strange woman wanted to adopt me—— Well, Ted, listen. I've been wanting to tell you a long, long story, and what do you say if we straighten things up, and have a chance to talk? I'd like to know what you think about something that's awfully important to me."

"Do you think I'm wise enough to be your lawyer?" Ted laughed. She knew Tony was

serious and was trying to cheer her up a bit.

"You think I'm silly and I don't blame you," her chum replied. "But you see, Ted, when I was alone so much at Cape Cod I got a lot of foolish notions. But there's one I'm not trying to outgrow. That's the one I want a good chance to talk to you about."

"And I'm a perfectly cracker-jack listener. But we must wait 'till the morning trade rolls by. Do you know we are doing first rate with our business?"

"I hope you are. You work hard enough."

"And you work hard enough. Honestly, Tony, I don't feel you should do all this for nothing——"

"For nothing! Why Ted, this is the best and biggest education I ever had. Aunt Mattie is so delighted she told Daddy last night she thought we ought to buy a stand just to finish up my education."

"No you don't. No opposition around here," Ted joked. "There isn't enough trade for me just now. I'm determined to make this pay well," and she slammed things around to be sure of her determination. "But we've got to have customers if we're going to sell goods."

Tony was still thinking of the woman who had just left. "You know, Ted, we always said there was something queer about Lady

Jess," she began again. "And that's a foolish thing to call her, isn't it?"

"Don't you remember I told you when she first came she had some sort of fancy name? You see, she was a singer——"

"Oh, then that accounts for it," Tony interrupted, glad to account for it in some way. "Yes, singers do try out a lot of names; I know that."

"Well, it seems to me I heard that this particular singer was disappointed because of her health. She went abroad, they all do of course, and when she came back to make her big hit, I guess her voice wasn't hitting just right. But look here, Tony," Ted suddenly broke off. "You're not trying to connect her with some big crime or something like that, are you? Why all the mystery?"

Tony sighed before she smiled. She knew Ted was right, and that she really was working up a mystery out of very few particulars. But she had something in the back of her mind that seemed stronger and stranger than mere facts. And it was all this, or as much of it as she could put into words, that she wanted to talk over with Ted.

All of which worked out nicely for their customers seemed to come in flocks this morning, and the girls were obliged to put aside

their mystery until all were waited upon, and there was old Mrs. Gray, for instance, who always brought her basket and bought so little. Today it was nothing more than two tomatoes and three lemons, and oh, yes; she came back all the way from the avenue to beg two nice clean paper bags and a little empty box, to put some of her homegrown fresh eggs into. Mrs. Gray was as gray as her name. She took a lot of time, talked a lot about everything, but the girls liked her. She always brought them a few, a very few, nice fresh flowers, and today they were prettier than usual. Three really darling early pink roses constituted the donation.

"How do you like housekeeping now?" Ted asked Tony as Tony was standing off a little to admire the roses in their setting of lovely fresh fruits.

"I love it," answered Tony. "I've been telling Mattie I believe regular housekeeping is all wrong and this way is all right. We never have to open windows nor dust chairs or polish floors here."

"Because we only handle one department here," Ted explained. "This is merely an active pantry and, of course, there is no dusting to do in a pantry."

"Then I think the kitchen and dining room

should be merely bay windows in the pantry, and have no more work in it than just benches to sit on and little tables to eat from."

"That's the tea room idea. And I suppose you are thinking of sticking a tea room out there under the big tree," Ted suggested.

"Why couldn't we?"

"Not this season. I've got to make this pay first," Ted wisely declared. "You see, my dad wants me to go to college and I expect to when I finish High. But I don't feel I've just got to sit around and look pretty waiting for that time to come. Not that I could really look pretty——"

"Not that you could look any other way," Tony complimented. And she was not fooling either.

CHAPTER XII

HARD TO UNDERSTAND

WHEN it comes to making up mysteries leave it to a couple of girls; girls who have imagination, of course. And no one who knew them could deny that Ted and Tony had lots and lots of good locality and active imagination.

Ted had closed up shop because it was simply dashing rain, and if anyone did want anything at the stand it would have been spoiled, probably, in handing it out. Besides that, if they had sold two apples or two tomatoes or a box of crackers, the chances were that more would have been spoiled in handling and in opening up the big drop shutter that kept the rain out. So Ted closed down.

It was one of those dreary days that come to the beach when it rains, and it seems as if the rain comes down from the clouds and up from the ground, and then crosswise to make it come from all directions at once. Can there

be a day anywhere else ever as dull and dreary as that sort of day at the seaside?

But it always affords a time for doing something that one will never do at any other time; the thing that is always put off because there are so many other pleasanter things to do. Well, here were Ted and Tony at home in Ted's darling little bungalow, the one her Aunt Nannie had rented before she had had her attack of rheumatism, and before she knew the stand would have to be attended to by someone other than herself. That was why Ted took it over; she had had other summer plans, but when her darling Aunt Nannie found she had to limp around the little bungalow, and couldn't possibly have the wonderful time she had hoped for, out in the open air with her little market stand to look after —then Ted gave up everything and did what Nannie had been hoping to do herself.

That was why the wayside stand was being managed by a young girl, although often young girls do more than manage, in the thorough way they help at these stands. Besides this, there was always the hired woman who helped Nannie and who kept as close watch around the stand where the girls were, as any really good officer might have done.

She was a Mrs. Cutting from the back road,

and her greatest fault was the way and amount she talked. Ted always dreaded getting her started, and Nannie always dreaded both start and finish, for the finish merely meant another and a stronger attack. No one ever talked like Mrs. Cutting, but, just the same, Ted's little watch dog was not more faithful than she, when it came to looking after "them two youngsters."

She was not around just at present, for which everyone especially the girls, were thankful, for *they* wanted to talk. The bungalow was cheery even on this dark and dreary day, and as Tony sat beside Ted on the little porch swing, that couldn't get wet no matter how it rained, she had a fit of conscience for having induced Martha to take their old homestead place, just because Major, the horse happened to be in that particular bargain.

"This is such a darling place," she attempted to say when Ted interrupted her.

"Now, let's tell our stories," she put in. "I wish I could tell you about last summer. We had a real ghost hunt up in the Maine woods and such a time! My cousin, Cecy was almost dead from nervousness when we began, but before we 'laid the ghost' she was just as jolly as any of us."

"The ghost?" Tony queried.

"Yes, quite a real and lively one too." She was referring to the story told in our first volume: A Girl Called Ted. But there was no more time just then for that. It was Tony who had a confidence to impart, and as she needed advice Ted was urging her along toward getting it.

"You remember I told you about how I felt when I first heard I wasn't really Tony Potter," Tony began a little carefully.

"Oh, yes," the reassuring Ted replied. "But I think you've got a lot better time than most any girl I know, no matter how many parents they have." She laughed at that joke and her jolly spirits were bound to keep Tony's jolly also. At least, that was what she was trying to do.

"And then, when I found my hero Daddy-Tom had been disappointed in love, I was determined to find that mean thing who left him, if it took me all my life."

"Imagine that!" almost roared Ted. "As if you could start out and advertise in every town, city or country. 'Sweetheart of my Daddy-Tom please take notice!' Tony, you're the limit. However did you expect to find a person without any clues?"

"But I had clues."

"What were they?"

"Her name was Jessie Weaver."

"And of course she married and changed that."

"No, she didn't. I heard Tom say he had written her just before we came here, and he didn't say she was married."

"But did he say she wasn't married?"

"No, not in just those words."

"Then how did you know?"

"I could guess the way he spoke of her."

"Tony Potter." Ted gave the swing a good foot push, and it banged against the back rail. "You are the funniest kid. Imagine your reading the love thoughts of a real grown man just by his tone of voice."

"I can, just the same," Tony insisted. "I know our Tom so well, you know. I can tell."

"Well, as your lawyer I'm not so sure on that point, (do they call it a point?) but we'll let it pass? What was your other clue?"

"That she had been to Europe, that she had come back, that she must have loved cedar and rosebuds, because Tom had them wrapped up with his love letters, all faded and broken."

Ted's face changed to the serious look. "Let me see," she pondered. "Have you any idea where *she* might be?"

"She might be around here."

"Around here?"

"Yes. When I threw out our scrap papers before we left Cape Cod, there was one envelope in it with a New Jersey postmark and I think it was Asbury Park."

"Well, now, that's exciting," declared Ted. "Maybe the runaway sweetheart comes right up to our stand and buys things from us! How's that?"

"Maybe she does," rejoined Tony, but she wasn't joking about it.

"Wouldn't that be thrilling?" Ted squeezed Tony's arm.

"Well, yes it would, if I didn't hate her so much."

"Hate your Daddy-Tom's sweetheart?"

"Yes, I do. I hate her for making him so—so lonely."

"But how do you know what happened?"

"I don't. But I'm sure it wasn't his fault."

"And maybe it wasn't her fault."

"It must have been."

"Why?"

"Well, Ted Layton," and Tony shot both her feet out straight, although she probably didn't even see the mud stain she got when she tried to give Major a little encouragement that morning, "it had to be someone's fault, didn't it?"

"No, it might have been something that no one could help."

"Oh, Ted, don't be silly. Do you mean to say people couldn't help not loving each other?"

This was too much for both of them, and they set off into such a gale of laughter that Nannie came out to see what could be so funny.

"You girls are having a fine time," she greeted them in her kindly way, and Tony saw again how much she was like Mattie, only older, of course.

"Yes, we're glad it rained, Nannie," Ted answered her. "Sit right down here out of the dampness."

"No, no dear, I couldn't. I've got to get back where it's dry and warm. And besides, you know I'm canning those berries you couldn't get rid of yesterday."

"We should be helping you," Ted proposed politely, although helping with canning was a new idea to her.

"Thank you, dear, but I'm almost finished. And those raspberries do make a lovely jam."

"Why don't we try to sell it?" Tony further proposed.

"So we might," Ted agreed. "Tony, you've got a good business head. Selling homemade

jams would be a lot safer than selling those berries that get whiskers on them overnight. How many glasses have we got, Nannie?"

"There'll be a dozen or more. And it's a good idea to sell them now, while they look so rosy. We would have trouble carrying them home," the woman finished, already turning back toward the kitchen door that was protected on the porch side by an awning curtain, well tied to the rail.

When the girls were alone again Ted started right in where they had left off.

"Look here, Tony," she said seriously, "I believe you are right in hoping to find your Aunt Jessie Weaver. She's rich, you say——"

"Ted! As if that made any difference."

"Oh, I don't mean that it would in one way, but in another——"

"I'd like her better if she wasn't rich," declared Tony indignantly. "That's all the more reason why she could have done as she pleased."

"I see what you mean. You mean she wasn't a girl who had to work and give up what she wanted to help support someone."

"Exactly."

Ted hesitated before speaking again. She realized how indignant Tony could get, when they touched upon one part of the family

being rich, while she, Tony, had always seemed to enjoy being poor.

"But you know, Tony, a nice rich aunt——" she stopped suddenly. "I wonder, Tony," she said very, very gently, "if she would want to take you away from Tom and Mattie?"

"She couldn't," again that excited manner showed Tony's antagonism. "I'm legally adopted. And I remember when we were in Cape Cod, long ago it seems to me now, Daddy-Tom said Jessie had written him that *she* had no objection to my adoption. As if she could have had, even if she wanted to." There was scorn mingled with that exclamation.

"But this is what puzzles me, Tony. How do you know it would be a good thing to find her? Suppose she is married——"

"Oh, Ted! Didn't I tell you she wasn't?"

"Yes, so you did, darling." Ted was trying so hard to be helpful, but plainly the subject was a difficult one to handle. "Yet, with her not married perhaps it wouldn't make either of them happier——"

"I guess you're right, Ted," sighed Tony, running her finger through her black hair the way a boy does when he's thinking hard. "I used to think it would be simply wonderful to run in some day and shout out to Tom,

"I've found your sweetheart for you!" But that must have been a kid's idea. I suppose I ought to have more sense now and let lovers attend to their own affairs."

"Oh, I don't know," drawled Ted, determined not to let her chum drop too suddenly from her heights of romance. "It could be done. You could dash in and sing out the glad tiding and make your hero happy—if you found Jessie. And I could be outside listening and clapping——"

They laughed merrily at the idea, and if Ted had not found it necessary to talk about the next morning's marketing, likely that would have developed it into a real comic strip, with absurd gestures instead of pictures.

"But the thing to do, of course," Ted returned to the subject when she got a chance, "is to watch out. Say Jessie and roses and cedar, whenever a suspect comes up to the stand. Then watch her face and see if she's guilty."

"Don't be silly, Ted. Of course I could never even attempt to find her unless I asked Mattie where she might be found. I could do that without making her suspect, if I went about it very carefully."

"Surely. It's perfectly natural that you should want to know about your own aunt.

And you could ask Mattie, just carelessly, where she was spending the summer. Why not do that?"

"Maybe it doesn't seem much to you, Ted, but to me it has been just like a detective story." Tony's eyes were wide with romance if not with a detective's cunning.

"And you are suspecting the Lady Jess right this very minute," Ted accused, jokingly.

"What did she hold my hand that way for?"

"Because—she—loves you!"

"Loves me, nothing. Why should she give a rap about a perfectly strange girl who is just selling her tomatoes?"

"Why should she hide herself if she happened to be the elusive Aunt Jessie?"

"Now, you're getting hot Ted, as we used to say when we played hide-and-go-seek. It's more interesting, or it should be more interesting, to know why she doesn't let me know where she is, than it might be to really find her."

And when Tony said that she said a great deal more than she had any idea of saying. For there was, indeed, an interesting story in the disappearance of her aunt, Jessie Weaver.

CHAPTER XIII

SUSPICION

TONY found Mattie quite excited, when she returned from the talk on the rainy-day porch.

"Tony dear," she began, "I wish you would not stay away so long at a time; it worries me."

"Why, Mattie?"

"Because things do happen to little girls——"

"Little girls! Why, you don't call *me* a little girl," and Tony stood up so straight she more than reached Mattie's shoulder. But she did not make Mattie laugh. In fact the look on her face was far from a smile, and seeing it Tony wondered.

"Did anything happen this morning, Mattie?" she asked, taking the towel from the rack and beginning to dry some late dishes without seeming to know she was doing it.

"Why no; nothing happened."

"But someone has been here. Who, Mattie?"

"Why lots of folks *call* here to find out if

we have fruit or fresh eggs to sell," Mattie replied not very frankly.

"But who was it who called and got you so excited?"

"Excited!" Mattie replied indignantly. "I'm not a bit excited."

"But your cheeks are a lovely red and your hands—— See how that hand is shaking."

"Go along, Tony. I'm busy and I've got to fry fritters for Tom's lunch."

"I can help. I'll dump the dripping on the pan, anyway. I know how to do that much." Tony had her big apron on and was dumping the dripping on the pan in less than no time. But she had not been misled by Mattie's evasion.

For some minutes they worked in silence, so far as words were concerned. But the air was charged with something more noisy than the spattering of the grease that fried around the fritters.

Tony had not told Ted everything. She had not even hinted at the fear she and Mattie both shared that Tom would sail away some day, away to the other end of the world perhaps, and not in a ship upon the seas.

"That would not be so bad," Tony constantly reflected, "but an airship! How could

they let him go in an airship when every day's news told of the brave men lost in the perils of the sky?"

Had she told Ted of that dread she knew perfectly well Ted would have laughed at her. Why should a good, strong healthy girl like Tony, be afraid of having a big strong man ride in an airship?

But how could anyone else know, that there had been planted in Tony's heart, when she was two years old, a terrible dread. It was the night of that fire, she felt she remembered it, but she knew now that all her girhood years had been hemmed in by some dread. And she instinctively felt it was the poison dread she had drunk into her little girl heart, with those clouds of smoke, which her pranks, and all her tomboyish ways, were not strong enough to wipe out. And if even Mattie knew it was there, Tony had never told her.

But Ted was different. She was not afraid of anything silly like fire and smoke of years long past. She was a girl of today, a high school girl who would not allow the high school boys to beat her at spending vacations profitably. She was earning quite a lot at her pretty wayside stand, and she was having an awfully good time doing it.

"Oh, wait, Mattie," Tony now interrupted

her thoughts, "I brought some fresh parsley today and it's as green as the greenest green in the world." She dashed out of the kitchen to the old-fashioned back porch, where a vegetable basket of bushel size held that line of provisions. On top, she found her pretty fresh parsley that certainly was as green as she had declared it to be.

Washing it all the times required by the careful Mattie, Tony began cutting it into a lovely little green dust on the cutting board. Mattie approved with very few words, in fact she could not be made to say much, no matter how hard Tony tried. Certainly there was something serious on her mind.

"And she was worried about me being over to Ted's," Tony reflected wondering why a thing so usual and so perfectly safe, could have bothered the reliable, dependable Mattie.

Tom came in for lunch jollier than usual because he loved rainy days. And he noticed Mattie's distraction the first thing.

"Why so solemn, Mattie?" he began. "You look as if Old Bad News had been calling on you."

She didn't answer, merely gave a defenseless fritter an awful flop.

Tony looked at her anxiously. Certainly

something like Bad News must have been around to make Mattie act like that. But understanding their home law of meals without unpleasantries, Tony did not press her query.

"Been pretty busy today," Tom told them when he had buttered a good supply of his fritters, so could talk without worrying about the task.

"What's going on?" Tony asked. "I saw your men flying up and down the avenue in all the rain this morning."

"Yes. We got orders to move that fancy camp they have over Winding Way; if they don't move themselves."

"You mean the Health Camp in the pines?"

"That's the one. A lot of cranks think they can make themselves over——"

"Oh, you won't have to make *them* go away, will you, Dad?" There was a sudden burst of anxiety in Tony's voice.

"Sure will. Why? Got a friend there?"

"Oh yes. That is, I know one of the ladies there." She couldn't tell who, even if she had wanted to. "Why must they move?"

"Complaints," replied the big trooper, indifferently. "People don't want folks sunning and mooning themselves all over the place, and that's what those cranks do. I know that myself."

"Sunning themselves is all right, surely," Mattie deigned to insert. "Everybody nowadays knows how important the sun is. But mooning!"

"Yep. They sleep out in the open, eat out in the open and live so open——" Tom paused to enjoy a chuckle, "that other folks seem jealous, or something like that. At any rate, they've got to move on and find a high-toned gypsy quarters outside our lines. They've got plenty of money from what I hear," he went on, beginning on his tea and ending on his doughnut. "I guess a move won't hurt any of them. I notice they've got a flock of fancy cars around that grove."

"Oh yes, they've all got cars; Ted told me they were all well off," Tony put in still in a serious tone. "But when do you suppose they'll have to go, Dad?"

"Why, pretty soon. What makes you care so much, Puss? Got some fairy godmother among that set? Maybe she's the one who offered you the dog you didn't get," he joked, hitting the mark much nearer than he had hoped to.

"She is" blurted out, Tony, unexpectedly.

"Well, who is she?" quite as suddenly demanded Mattie.

"I don't exactly know——"

"You don't know?" That was Tom.

"That is, of course, I know her, but she uses different names."

"Better keep away from that lady. Mattie, I'll have another glob of that pudding and a hunk of the hard sauce. It's first rate."

Mattie looked more than anyone said, as she left to fill her brother's order. She was by no means forgetting whatever her new worry was, because of this conversation. Tony glanced at her and smiled, but Mattie missed the smile. Then Tony tried to answer Tom's challenge.

"She's just lovely, all the same," she began, referring of course, to the lady of changing names. "And the only reason we don't know her name positively is that she's such a joker."

"Must be," Tom cut in succinctly.

"Well, she is really, Dad," Tony defended. "She talked to us the other day; laughed about our names being boys' names and said she'd like one herself."

"And I suppose," said Mattie crisply, "she's an old lady wanting to be called a boy's name."

"She isn't old, Mattie. She's beautiful——"

"And gay," chimed in Tom. "All the beau-

ties over at the health cure place make themselves believe they're very gay and merry. Of course, that's part of the cure." He was leaving the table, the glob of pudding and the hunk of hard sauce gone from the flowered plate.

"Have *you* ever been over there, Dad?" Tony asked hesitantly.

"Me? I should say not. Don't catch us troopers making friends at that sort of camp. If we did, the ladies would expect us to ride around all night just to watch their old flopping tents."

"Oh." Tony was somehow glad he had never been to Rollywood, that is, he could not have seen the persons camped there, and so he could not have seen the Lady Jess. Had he seen her, Tony's hopes would have been crushed. There was still a chance of her suspicion being correct, just a very slim chance, of course. But she didn't like the idea of the camp having to move away. That would take Lady Jess, and then she might never know. But Tom was going out now and she had to talk quickly. At the same time she had to be most careful of what she said.

"Dad," she began breathlessly, "when did you say they want the campers to move?"

"The quicker the better. But *you* don't go

with them." He half laughed as he said that, nevertheless he looked critically at Tony as he kissed her goodbye.

"Oh, no. Don't worry about that. I'm not going any place."

"What makes you two talk so silly?" Mattie asked, that same anxiety spoiling her usually pleasant face. "Why should she be going any place?"

"She shouldn't, I just wanted to make that clear. Want anything from town, Mattie?"

"Yes, I did want something. Let me see." Mattie pondered, struggling with a disturbed memory.

"Was it nutmeg, Mattie? You said you used the last in the pudding——"

"We need that too, but there was something else." She pondered again. No she couldn't think of it. "Well, never mind," she decided, "it's apt to be showery anyhow, and it can wait until tomorrow."

"All right," agreed Tom. "I may be a little late at that. If the inspector comes over from Monmouth he may want to line all the men up and *he* has a late dinner hour. Well, be good girls. Tony, keep away from the woman who sports a lot of names," he joked. "One name at a time ought to be good enough

for anybody, even if she does take moonlight cures. Goodbye, girls," and he swung into the motor-cycle that had been resting against the porch, starting off the next moment, while Tony, as usual, stood there watching him go.

She did not at once turn back to clear off the table. Instead, she watched the cycle until it was only a dark speck on the bright sandy road, and its cutting roar toned down to a reasonable rumble.

She was thinking fast: Suppose that should really be Jessie, his Jessie! And suppose he should drive her away without ever knowing! Wouldn't that be too sad, too awful? But she couldn't possibly mention even to Mattie her girlish fancy. There was so little to base it on. Nothing more, really than a sort of suspicion. She could tell Ted but not Mattie. But the Lady Jess had squeezed her hand and she had looked at her queerly. And she had promised a dog that Tony herself thought it best not to accept. A dog would be too much trouble around Ted's stand, and Tony herself had quite a lot to do in attending to old Major.

That reminded her. She hadn't been down to see Major all morning.

"I guess I'll give Major some hot mash,"

she told Mattie, returning hurriedly to the kitchen. "He acted queer last night and this morning he hardly noticed me."

"That horse is getting old, too old," Mattie replied quite unlike her usual self. She too loved Major and had always given him special attention. But now she was calling him old.

"Why Mattie!" Tony exclaimed, "whatever is the matter? You act as if someone had been here and—and frightened you."

"Now dear, don't go getting notions like that. You know nobody frightens *me,*" and Mattie did bring her good nature back to the point of a real affectionate smile that time.

"But you act so—queer!" Tony was almost under Mattie's arm, snuggling up in the way she always had of showing how much she loved and depended upon her.

"Well, you see, dear, there were two people here this morning——"

"Two people?"

"Yes. From that health place."

"What did they want?"

"They said they wanted Officer Potter."

"Well, that was all right; wasn't it?"

"Yes." She hesitated, seemed about to say something else, and then didn't.

"You see," Tony pressed, "that would be about their having to move."

"Yes, I thought of that too," Mattie agreed. "But they said they wanted to see him about his little girl."

CHAPTER XIV

OLD BILL RYAN

MATTIE'S assertion gave Tony a start.

"You mean some stranger inquired for me?" she asked quickly.

"Not exactly that. They said the message concerned Tom Potter's little girl."

"They meant me, of course," conceded Tony. "But surely I'm no little girl."

"People say that when they're sort of old-fashioned," Mattie explained, seeing Tony's excitement now. "But it's nothing to worry about."

"Why should they want me?" It was the possibility of the Lady Jess wanting her that really caused the sudden stir in Tony's feelings.

"He wouldn't say——"

"He? Who was it?"

"Oh, just an old man. I don't know him and that was why I wondered," Mattie vaguely said. "I see now, since Tom told us about the people having to move their camp, it must have been something to do with that."

"But I had nothing to do with that," Tony was mixing the mash for Major, but she probably had forgotten what the moving of her big spoon was doing.

"Well, just don't go so far away from home for a while," cautioned Mattie. "We're strangers here and those health people are always cranks."

"But who came? What sort of person?"

"An old man; I suppose he was one of the caretakers there. You see, dear, everybody thinks our Tom is wonderful, but he has to uphold the law he serves," finished Mattie loyally and proudly too.

"I can't see——" Tony smelt the mash scorching and pushed it back. "Well, whoever it was will come again, if it was anything important. We needn't worry that we've missed anything." Which was exactly what she was worrying about.

"People with such queer notions are apt to be——" Mattie hesitated. But Tony knew what she was thinking. She was thinking that cranks of one sort may be cranks of another sort, and that there is no accounting for their queer notions. Therefore she, Mattie, would feel better if Tony stayed around home until all those people were safely moved to more distant quarters.

The mash was ready and steaming: Tony must take it out to poor, old, neglected Major.

"But you know, Mattie," she made a chance to say as she got a good grip on the rather heavy kettle, "I couldn't desert Ted now. She depends on me, and I love to help her."

"That's all right, dear, and you can continue to help her certainly," Mattie agreed. "But just for a day or two, better keep close to old Mattie," she smiled at calling herself names.

"All right—Grandma——" mocked Tony. "If you're going to be so old and scary, I suppose *I'll* have to stick around and take care of you." She was really going to Major now.

The rain had stopped, but the day was still dark and dismal. Down the long path under the old grape arbor Tony lugged the meal to Major, and as the wet weeds brushed her ankles she kicked them back playfully. She could do that without thinking, and she couldn't think of so many things at a time, or she didn't want to. Had she been a little wiser, however, she would not have kicked at the poor, bedraggled, wet weeds, because they merely snapped back and splashed her ankles well for being so thoughtless.

"Hello, old Maj——" she began, as her

horse from his stall with his head out over the door, whinnied accusingly.

"I know you're hungry, old boy," she continued to coax, "but I hope you're not sick. Are you?"

Tony had set her kettle down inside the old door and began giving Major his first course; some pretty white squares of the very best sugar.

"You're all right, Maj, aren't you?" she crooned to him. And he winked his ears, as well as one eye, quite contentedly.

"Been neglecting you, I have. But never mind. I'll be with you now, if Auntie Mattie has her way." She was dishing up the mash, putting it in his "wet-nose bag" the one Tony kept for these special feedings. Major nosed around her head playfully. He was all right. Who said he was sick? All he wanted was to get out. He'd even drag the old cart without kicking and without walking up on the sidewalk, if only Tony would give him another chance.

"No," bossed Tony. "Got to eat that all up first. See that blob in the bottom?" How could he see it when the bag was off his nose and in her hands? But she was putting it on again.

There. He might as well finish it, although he didn't care so much for the hot wet stuff. A good feed of fresh cut oats, that was his choice.

Tony fussed around, picking things up that might just as well have been left down, looking over the old harness, it was the best she had and therefore entitled to some attention. A broken buckle, the one the shoemaker said positively would not break again, riveted her attention, and Major smiled, as a horse will when no one is looking. It is a horse rule never to let anyone, that is any human, see them smile, so that's why one never does.

"I guess you're all right, old boy," Tony said aloud, "and I'll take you out tomorrow. See if I don't. We couldn't deliver that early morning order to the nice lady the other day because that boy Bumps——"

She was standing in front of the old door, which was closed at the bottom and open at the top, and as she stopped suddenly in her talk to Major, a shadow, a man's shadow, came around from the corner of the barn and confronted her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, instinctively stepping back toward Major for protection. "What do you want?"

"You're Tom Potter's girl, ain't you?" a

voice asked. And now Tony saw that the speaker was a man, an old man, and just as she had feared, he was queer looking!

But she answered "Yes," in as strong a voice as she could command. Major would have barked had he known how, but he gave a good loud snort which Tony was grateful for. Then he stamped like a good fellow.

"Don't need to be afraid," the old man said. "I'm not going to hurt you——"

"I'm not afraid," bellowed Tony, the way scared people usually do. There was a side door to the barn and she was edging toward that. Once outside she could run back to the house in a jiffy.

"Wait a minute, please," the old man said. And something gentle in his voice caught Tony's attention. She waited.

"I came from Miss Jessie," he said.

"Miss Jessie!"

"Yes. You know her and she knows you," the old man went on. "They've got to go away, all of us. I'm just a handy man around, I've been looking after Miss Jessie——"

"Miss Jessie!" Tony repeated again, incredulously.

"Yes. And she told me to tell you personally and privately, that you were not to let Tom Potter know."

The old man seemed ready to go now, his message given, but Tony wanted to know more. She could not let him go and perhaps never get another chance to know——

"Wait a minute, please," she spoke, not timidly nor loudly this time. "What's your name?"

"I'm Bill Ryan," and he doffed his old cap naturally. "I took care of her horses when she lived at the big house, and I take care of her car now."

"What's her name, her real name?"

"Her name? You ought to know. Ain't you her sister's child?" There was indignation in his tone as if it were Tony who had deserted Jessie Weaver.

"I don't know whether I am or not," stumbled Tony. "But I just want to know exactly what her name is."

"Miss Weaver, Miss Jessica Weaver! that's her name. Her stage name was different, of course——"

"Mr. Ryan," began Tony, too excited to be exact, "I don't see why she should send me a message, asking me not to tell my folks about her being around here."

"Suit yourself, Miss. I've had my orders and I've delivered the message. My part is done. But I can tell you this, Miss Jessie is

"I CAME FROM MISS JESSIE," HE SAID

a lady every inch, and she knows what she's doing. When she asks you to wait, to say nothing just now, she has her reasons, and you can bet, they're good ones. So if I was you, I'd agree."

"But she's going away——"

"She is."

"And if I let her go he, my—my uncle, will not know——" Tony didn't know how to proceed. She found it impossible to tell the old man why she felt she should tell Tom about Jessie.

"Now looka here, Miss. You're a smart little girl, and I can see the Weaver family in your eyes. I don't blame you a-tall for not wanting to keep secrets from your folks. They're fine folks, every one around here knows that. Tom Potter is as fine a cop as ever rode a bike," said the old man enthusiastically, while Tony wondered how he could ever call her Dad's wonderful motor-cycle a bike. "But the idea is this," he went on, glancing cautiously around to make sure no one was coming. "Miss Jessie has plans, big plans. And it would interfere with them if you gave her away just now. So be a good girl; I must run along. Your lady up at the house will be wondering what's keeping you. What'll I tell Miss Jessie?"

"Tell her," said Tony, trying to be wise and at the same time not lose this wonderful chance of finding the one person she had so long dreamed of discovering, "tell her" she repeated, "that I'll do the best I can."

"Angels can do no more," said old Bill Ryan, who, Tony had already decided, looked too much like a retired jockey to have been anything else.

The next minute she heard a car chug, and then saw him in it, going around the little strip of road that led to the old homestead front driveway.

Tony gave Major a final pat, letting him brush her hair with his big head, as he always liked to, then she hurriedly locked the door and started down the path.

When she got to the back door she heard voices around at the front.

"He's talking to Mattie!" she told herself. "I wonder——"

"That's all right," she heard Mattie saying. "I'll tell my brother."

"Thank you, Ma'am," Bill Ryan replied. "It's all right and the people will be moving off—— Some of them have gone already. You see, when I called before I thought to ask Officer Potter to speak for us. And some of

the ladies know the little girl that helps at the stand——"

"Yes. That's a friend's stand and our girl helps her sometimes," Mattie explained. Tony wouldn't have said that. She thought too much of Ted to put it that way.

"So don't bother the officer at all," Bill wound up, and Tony heard his engine give a premonitory snarl. "We'll be off soon. We liked this place. But then," and he chuckled into a good-sized laugh, "the folks at our camp have queer ideas. Between you and me, a good day's work would be the makings of most of them. Well, good day, Ma'am, and thank you kindly." Then he was off.

Mattie was laughing when Tony came in the kitchen. What a changed face from the one Tony had left? This was the happy, jolly Mattie; the other had been a worrying, anxious Mattie.

"Well, wasn't I the goose?" she greeted Tony. "To be worrying about that good-natured old man. He just wanted Tom to speak for those campers, and when he mentioned you it was merely to let us know that some of the campers knew some of us. Well, that takes a load off my mind——"

"You certainly were worried," Tony

agreed. "Seemed to think someone was out to kidnap little me."

"Antoinette! What a thing to say!" But the indignation gave Mattie away. Evidently that was the very fear that had been lurking in her mind, although, of course, she would not have admitted it even to herself.

But the gloom was dislodged and both Tony and Mattie chatted away, quite as they usually did, Tony being particular to point out the return to freedom and to Ted's stand that this circumstance brought about for her.

"So it's all right now, Mattie darling," she promptly began. "No more kidnapping worries."

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way, although you are only joking, Tony dear," Mattie rejoined. "The very word brings to one's mind the agonies so many poor mothers have had to suffer."

"That's true, darling," Tony admitted. "We girls just don't think enough about others. I'll remember."

"It isn't that you don't think, or that you are selfish," Mattie explained. But it's because you haven't had enough experience. Well, dear, wasn't it a good joke about the old man?"

"Bill Ryan?"

"Is that his name? How did you know?"

Tony had been too quick that time. She should not have said that.

"Oh, he's an old fellow that works around the Rollywood Camp," she replied casually, "Isn't he a tipical jockey?"

"He certainly is," replied Mattie.

And Bill Ryan certainly was.

CHAPTER XV

THE RUSH HOUR

Now what would she do? What could she do?

"It is Jessie," she kept telling herself to make sure she believed it. "To think I should have found her like that! And just as Ted had joked that we might."

Tony was busy helping Mattie with some early fruit preserves; the fruit had been bought from Ted's stand so that it would not be a loss to the young proprietor, and of course, Mattie made sure, like any other good housekeeper, that it would not cause a loss on her budget. And quite wonderfully Tony was helping with the preserving. Who could deny the benefit Ted's companionship had been to the girl, who so lately had despised the small but important home tasks?

"I'm so glad," Mattie remarked, "that those funny folks are going away of their own accord. Shows they have some sense."

"Yes, I suppose it is better——"

"Why, dear," Mattie's voice showed sur-

prise, "you must *know* it is better. Think of the trouble the troopers have been saved. It is no easy matter to make folks go when they don't want to——"

"I don't suppose they could really make them go if they didn't break any laws."

"Why Tony! Didn't you *want* them to go? You talk as if you were on their side. Who is that at the side door?" she asked, hearing a noise in that direction.

"Oh, it's Ted. Come in, Ted," called out Tony. "I'm doing the squashy berry act. Ouch!" she exclaimed sharply. "That's hot and it went over my fingers instead of over the glass. Hello Ted! Come on and help. Those glasses are all boiled up and here's the dipper spoon——"

"Tony dear, let Ted sit down and watch us. She gets enough of this at home," expostulated Mattie.

"Oh, well, all right. But Ted adores pickles and preserves. I'll be through in a minute." Tony was hurrying about too quickly for the task in hand, and that was probably why the jelly had slopped over.

"Thought you were coming over this afternoon," Ted at last got a chance to interject.

"Thought so myself," Tony fired back, "but Mattie here got me all smeared up with her

jelly." She was licking two fingers and thinking about licking a couple more. "And oh, yes. Major got lonesome; felt I'd been neglecting him, I guess, and I had to give him a little petting. What's new, Tony?"

"Haven't you heard?" Ted was, as usual, pretty in her severe simplicity, for, since taking the stand in charge, she wore the plain but attractive wrap around percale dresses. The one she had on now was rose colored with, of course, the short sleeves and white collar and cuffs attached. Her blond hair fitted her head like a golden cap, and the little natural wave in it just looked like bends in the shining gold.

"Haven't I heard what?" Tony was still excited and therefore abstracted.

"About our beloved campers moving away." There was a deeper significance to the remark than the mere word implied. Ted knew that Tony would understand, that Lady Jess would be moving with the campers.

"Oh, yes," Tony drawled, to show great indifference. "They are going. An old fellow was around here twice today and bothered Mattie. They thought our Tom could get them permission to stay longer. They were only here on a permit, it seems." All her fin-

gers having been well licked of the stray drops of jelly a most unsanitary proceeding for one acquainted with health rules for food stands, Tony was now through with the job, and Mattie was putting the glasses in the back pantry. And the signs and countersigns that the two girls were exchanging would have done credit to a better cause.

All this while, ever since old Bill Ryan had appeared like a ghost jockey beside Major's stall, and Major, knowing a jockey when he saw one, had stamped impatiently to get out and try a few paces, ever since that time Tony had been trying to figure out what she should do and what would be best for her to do. There was, in her mind, a difference of opinion on both these points. What she should do, was to tell Mattie. At least she rather felt that was what she should do. But what was going to be best might be to comply with that unexplained request of the variously named Jessie, and not say anything about old Bill's message until some releasing word would come from the lady herself.

But now, here was Ted, with news which she, Ted, expected Tony to be all excited about, while Tony was carrying the real secret around, something like a ton of bricks;

that is it seems about as heavy as that load might have been, Tony imagined, only bricks were bricks, but what was this?

"I've just got to have time to think it out," she was warning herself, "and I musn't tell either Ted or Mattie until I have time to think."

That was why, later, over at the stand, she said not one word about old Bill's message. Ted was simply bursting with the news about the removal of the health camp, and not too happy about it either.

"We'll miss their trade," was one of her first remarks, and Tony promptly said she knew they would.

"And your Lady Jess——" Ted ventured.

"Yes," sighed Tony dramatically. "I suppose that chance is gone. We may never know." She suddenly became very busy fixing things up. Of course, the shut-down of the morning on account of the rain made that necessary. Ted herself was hustling to be ready for the early evening or late afternoon trains, when so many good customers might be reasonably expected to stop at the stand.

"I thought you'd be terribly excited," Ted pressed. "I could hardly wait to go over and tell you."

"I am—terribly excited," Tony confessed.

"In fact, I'm all of a flutter. No fooling, Ted, I really am."

"It is a shame. Just when we were getting acquainted. You should see poor old Bumps. He's just heartbroken. Even his eyes look like bumps now."

"They were good to him too, I mean, the camp folks," Tony went on rather cautiously. "And he just—adored his queen."

"Sure did," said Ted. "And he had quite a nice little business doing errands and attending to the fancy dog, Bilge. Well, things come and go," she sighed mockingly, as some old lady might have said it.

Presently there was the train rush to be attended to, and both girls turned hands and minds to the task. Nice young men seemed easiest to wait upon; in fact, Tony thought that young man with the very dark coat of tan beneath his Panama hat, would have taken potatoes for carrots had she offered them to him. He just didn't seem to mind at all how *his* order was filled; which showed plainly it was not *his* order. His mother's, perhaps.

Then there was the newly married chap, and maybe he wasn't fussy! Tony was glad Ted got him to serve, for he seemed prone to count the cabbage leaves, if he could have done so without destroying the whole head.

And as for lettuce, he both tasted and weighed it, to say nothing of getting its entire history from poor hurried Ted, who feared others might go away unserved while she attempted to serve him.

The women customers knew what they wanted and were determined to get it, although Ted had more than once announced there wasn't a single fresh egg left, and Tony had said, under her breath, there wasn't even an eggshell left. Yet these good housekeepers kept demanding fresh eggs, quite as if the girls had them hidden somewhere, or that they could turn nice red beets into nice white, fresh eggs by some magic absolutely unknown to any stand keepers in the good old U. S. A.

"No more lemon pie?" That was a motorman who loved lemon pie, and Tony hated to say no to him.

"Sorry," she said, "all gone."

"Humph." He evidently couldn't think of anything but lemon pie. "All gone, eh?"

"Yes, sir; all gone."

"Humph."

Tony couldn't leave him to wait on someone else, but a number of others were standing around, waiting to get away to suppers or dinners, as the case might be.

"Want to try an apple pie?" Tony suggested.

"What kind?"

"Apple."

"Fresh apple?"

"Oh, yes. We don't use canned apples."

"Don't eh?" He seemed so melancholy about the lemon pie. Must have had his mouth all set for it.

"Care for one?" Tony asked.

"How much?"

"Twenty or thirty five——"

"Gimme a twenty." And that order was finally finished, when the pie was wrapped, handed over the counter, and the disappointed motorman started off toward his bicycle.

"You're goin' to lose some fine customers," came the unpleasant, squeaky voice of that thin, freckled Miss Todd. She seemed to be glad the girls were going to lose customers, the way she grinned and showed her homely teeth.

Ted merely said, "Yes, she guessed so," without inviting any more from Miss Todd. But that lady didn't take the hint. She went right on.

"But it's a good thing someone had sense enough to chase them away——"

"Who chased them away?" fired back Tony, although Ted was trying to motion her not to say anything.

"Why, the police, of course. You ought to know, your pa's a cop, isn't he?"

"No, he isn't," snapped Tony. "He's a State trooper, and no one chased the ladies away from Rollywood. They went of their own accord," and the high and mighty tones of Tony might have been a warning to Miss Todd had she been looking out for warnings. But she wasn't.

"Well, I for one am glad they're gone. Complainin' about my hens and my chickens. As if chickens haven't the right to crow at daybreak, when they were created that way."

"But they weren't created to crow around here," Tony cut in, while more than one waiting customer laughed in approval.

"Since you're so smart, miss, I don't want anything from you," squeaked the unpleasant Miss Todd as she started off.

And in spite of dire threats made by hand wavings from Ted, Tony did answer her. She said:

"That'll be all right, Miss Todd, and we won't want any more of your noisy chicken's eggs, either."

Everyone at the stand laughed outright at

that, and Tony had grace enough to get back among the potatoes. Ted was not pleased; she would never have offended any customer, neither would she have spoken so before any of them. But she too laughed at Tony's saucy rejoiner, and didn't care a bit about possibly losing Miss Todd's stingy trade.

"She'll be back as soon as she wants anything," Ted felt obliged to remark to nice Marjorie Manning, who was just receiving from Ted's hands the lettuce and tomatoes she had been waiting for.

"She'll be back as soon as she gathers a few more eggs to sell," Marjorie remarked agreeably. "I don't blame folks for complaining about her chickens. They're dreadful. My poor grandfather is wakened every single morning with them."

"Why doesn't *he* complain to the police?" Tony quickly came from among the potato baskets to ask.

"Oh, he wouldn't do anything like that," Marjorie answered. "It is only that he doesn't sleep well——"

"Crowing chickens are against the health ordinances, I heard my Dad say so," Tony insisted. "And Miss Todd shouldn't be allowed to keep them where *she* lives. If she wants a chicken farm she should move far-

ther out. And you just tell your grandfather, Marjorie, if he wants to make a complaint against her old crowing hens——"

"Hens don't crow, Tony," Ted corrected.

"Well, against her crowers, whatever their name is. I'll tell Dad, and you see if she doesn't have to move them away. I guess there'll be more moving than the Rollywooders around here then."

The girls laughed, and the last of the hurried customers were now served. There was always a rush like that after the 5:20 train, and naturally it was just what both Ted and Tony wanted.

Miss Cutting, she who stayed around the place like a policeman but who talked like a radio, if she got a chance, was coming in now, ready to clean away the vegetable ends and attend to the roughest part of the work after the busy hour. She too was ready to talk about the moving campers.

"Quite some excitement," she began hopefully.

"Would you mind taking these carrot tops?" Ted cut in.

She took them, jammed them into her big basket and this time turned to Tony.

"Your Dad's been busy today, I'll bet. Those folks don't belong around here and it's

a good thing to get rid of them; I say——"

"Well, who does belong around here, for that matter?" Tony wanted to know, as Tony would.

"I do for one," and the big dish pan of water that had been keeping some green things extra fresh, was dashed outside the stand with a regular Niagara violence. "Born and brought up here—— Where do you want them cabbages, Ted?" she broke off suddenly. "Should I take them over to the house?"

"Whatever you like," Ted answered. "I'm too tired to think of old cabbages. Tony, let's fix up like regular girls and go in town to the movies after supper. Want to?"

Tony wanted to, and since Mattie decided a little later, of course, to go along, one evening at least was marked out of their business and out of Tony's new perplexities, by the enjoyment of a very good picture in a nice little theater in their pleasant little town.

But the delay only postponed the problems for Tony. She already knew she would have no ease or comfort, until she would tell Mattie about the peculiar message given her that afternoon by old Bill Ryan.

CHAPTER XVI

TELLING MATTIE

At last. Tony was up in her bedroom with the bending roof, the lights were out and she had a chance, the chance she needed, to think.

"I just can't believe it," she told herself, "to think it would have come and gone like that! My mystery solved and yet unsolved."

The old room in the old farmhouse was comfortable enough on nights like this: this was a pleasant night after the long day's rain and longer clearing. The small windows were framed with Mattie's matchless skill in arranging dainty, Swiss curtains, that now blew in and out in the most friendly way, as the stiff, clear breeze tossed them from their proper line of hanging straight down, like a pretty frame for the windows.

Tony was enjoying her new bedroom suite, the one Tom insisted she select for herself when they came up from Cape Cod, and the newness of her pretty things dominated the old room, which otherwise might easily have been dismal, not to say musty and gloomy.

So here she was now, stretched out in bed, her door closed, she seldom closed it, and her mind put deliberately to the task of deciding an important matter—important, she was sure, for more than just herself.

"It's this way," she began. "If I tell Mattie that old Bill has actually told me the strange lady really is our Jessie Weaver, and if Mattie should tell Tom——"

This was rather too difficult to answer straight off. What would happen if she, Mattie, did tell Tom? Who knew how Tom felt about Jessie Weaver now? Maybe it wouldn't make a bit of difference to him.

"But it would, of course. I'm sure he loves her yet, for our Tom would go on loving forever; he's like that."

Then Tony, who was becoming more like Ted and less like the queer girl who had been beset with Cape Cod fancies, set herself to wondering just what would happen if Tom and Jessie made up again?

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if they married and set up a lovely home!"

This idea led her thoughts far afield indeed, for she was not only picking out the place for Tom's home, but she was building it, furnishing it, and temporarily running it, in her mind, of course.

"But we would have to live somewhere near him," she temporized. "We've had him so long, and Mattie simply lives to work for our Tom."

But here she stopped planning, if not actually thinking.

What about her and Ted going off to college, as they had planned? Ted was going to be some kind of an engineer, because her father was a very important engineer, and lately they had planned just what they hoped to do after both had finished High. Of course, Ted was older and much further advanced in her studies than was Tony, but even that difficulty was to be overcome, if their plans for college prep and then college, worked out as they hoped they would.

Tony jumped up and went to the window. Solitary thinking for too long a time made her fidgety, and after all, it didn't get her any place. She sat down in the chintz covered chair, without lighting her lamp—they had electricity in the old farmhouse or Tom would not have taken the place. Tom knew good things, and while not fussy, was at least appreciative of the modern conveniences.

"He hasn't been talking about aeroplanes lately," Tony told herself, sitting there with the curtain brushing her face. "But that

doesn't mean anything. He might be actually planning a flight."

She wouldn't go on with that idea. She dreaded the day when she might look at the sky and know that her Tom was soaring there so far from safety.

"The terrible height," she shuddered now. "Some girls of today may like the idea of shooting around like skyrockets, but give me a canoe with a chance to swim." Thus she pondered.

The telephone was ringing—Mattie was answering it. Tony quickly opened her door to listen. Tom was not in yet, and there was always that unnamed fear that something might happen to him. Being an officer of the law is, indeed, a dangerous business, and Tom Potter was one of the many officers brave far beyond personal safety.

"All right, Tom," Tony heard Mattie answering, and her instant relief brought her quickly out into the hall to meet Mattie as she left the 'phone.

"Dad not coming home?" she asked.

"No. One of the men is sick and he's taking his post. But he'll be home before morning. I'm glad it stopped raining. Isn't it a beautiful night?"

"Perfect," said Tony. And then, after all

her planning and calculating, after all her reasoning was deliberating, she did the thing she knew she would do from the very beginning of that new adventure, she started right in to tell Mattie every word old Bill Ryan had told her.

"Mattie love," she began, as quickly as Mattie had turned out the sitting room light and was ready again to enter her own room, "I've got something awfully important to tell you."

"Important?"

"Yes. Let's go in your room: it's cosier there. Yes," she continued as they prepared to settle down for a good talk in Mattie's big chairs, "it's important, I think, and interesting, I know. You'd never guess?"

"How could I guess? But, at any rate, it seems to be about something pleasant, so that's something. Now come, girlie, let's hear the great secret. I knew you had it on your mind all afternoon."

"I had." Tony surely was making the most of her big story. "You see, Mattie—love, the idea was, I was not to tell a word of this to anybody: not for a while at least. But I soon found out I had to tell you if I wanted any sleep tonight."

Tony had on her pink crêpe robe and she

looked pretty, Mattie thought; very pretty in pink, with her dark eyes and dark hair. Mattie felt very much like cuddling Tony in the corner of her own big chair, as she usually did when a confidential chat was imminent. But she decided not to. Tony was growing up. Her companionship with Ted had done much to develop her own resources, and Mattie noted with pleasure, how much more self reliant Tony was really becoming. Rather than bring her back to her usually childish sentimentality, Mattie stayed in her own corner and let Tony stay in hers.

"Well, Tony," she encouraged, "what's the big story? Has some one left us a million or maybe someone is just thinking about leaving us a million?"

"Now, Mattie, it's no joke. I have got a big story. You know old Bill Ryan?"

"The horse jockey?"

"I suppose he was a horse jockey, but he's a chauffeur now."

"That's the fellow. The one who gave me something to think about this morning? Well, what about old Bill Ryan?"

Tony felt her throat pinch queerly as she found the magical words coming to her lips.

"Mattie," she said in a hushed little voice,

"do you know who that lady really is who came to our stand and—and called herself Jess?"

"Jess," Mattie repeated, light dawning upon her and upon Tony's secret. "Why, you can't mean, Tony——"

"Yes I can too, and I do. She's Jessie Weaver!"

"Jessie Weaver! *Your* Aunt Jessie!"

"And our Tom's lost sweetheart. Isn't *that* more important?"

In her enthusiasm that bordered upon excitement, Tony had jumped up from her chair and was now pacing up and down the room, looking very silly, because a loose, flowing pink silk kimono, with floppy sleeves and trailing ends, doesn't work well in pacing. But Tony didn't care. She didn't even know that her left sleeve had almost dragged Mattie's pin cushion off the little yellow dish.

"You mean, Tony, that Jessie Weaver lives around here?"

"That's the worst of it. She doesn't live around here any more, but she did. And now she's—gone!" A sudden impressive stop made that point very clear. Tony no longer paced. She sat down, curled her feet up, slippers and all, in the ends of the pink silk robe.

"Now, Tony," begged Mattie, just a little annoyed, "will you please tell what has happened? How did you hear this? What has old Bill Ryan to do with all this? I've been suspecting, of course, there was something queer about the lady who had taken such a fancy to you. After all these years——"

"Yes. That's just what makes me mad. And I wouldn't give Jessie Weaver a thought if it weren't for Daddy-Tom." Tony would be heroic of course, dramatic, heroic and maybe a little melodramatic as well. She was being rather a wordy story teller.

Mattie's face had suddenly fallen into the lines Tony had begun to know too well. She was instantly ready to defend Tom from the girl who was now a woman; she who had left him alone all those lonely years, and she who had held his heart still, in spite of neglect, in spite of everything.

"Tell me about it, Tony," she asked again, "and don't get so excited."

"I'm not a bit excited, I'm just mad. To think that she's been around here, right with us all summer, and we didn't know. Now, she's gone, the land knows where."

"Whatever will Tom say?"

"Oh Mattie, you mustn't tell *him*." Tony was really excited now. "I've promised not

to. Gave old Bill my word I'd do the best I could——"

"Why should you promise not to tell?"

"I'll tell you, dear, if I can, intelligently. You see, old Bill came down to the barn when I was giving Major his mash. I was a little frightened first, but I soon saw he was all right, the way he patted Major and everything. Then he just up and told me that my Aunt Jessie Weaver was going away with the people from Rollywood, and I suppose, *she* supposed I knew exactly who she was and everything, because Bill simply said, she didn't want me to say anything to anybody about her having been here until I should hear from her."

"That's queer. But Jessie always was queer. She thought more of going on the stage, I guess, than she ever did about becoming Tom Potter's wife." The same bitterness Mattie betrayed a moment ago sounded in her voice now, and Tony understood how she felt about Tom and Jessie Weaver. She was plainly blaming Jessie.

"But I made up my mind I should tell you, of course, Mattie," went on Tony, "and I felt sure you would agree with me, that we mustn't say anything to Dad."

"It might be just as well, better, in fact,"

Mattie agreed abstractedly. "But isn't it strange that you should have found her? I often wondered what had become of her."

"I don't think it strange at all," Tony retorted. "Why, I've been determined all my life, to find her, and now she's just slipped away like some—some spirit, or something."

Mattie dropped her chin onto her hand and gazed hard at nothing. The way one does when thinking very seriously of something else. Tony knew she was pondering deeply, as she herself had been pondering over it ever since old Bill broke out in his broadcasting. Yes, it was something to think about, after all this time and never a word to Mattie from Jessie, never a word to little Tony from her mother's only sister. Surely a queer way to act. But it was on account of Tom, of course. There was no way to tell whether Jessie Weaver had been heartbroken or not. No way to tell what had separated them. Mattie was experienced enough in the ways of lovers to know that a small matter can and often does amount to a life-long regret.

"Perhaps," she said now to Tony, "like most young folks, both were headstrong and both were very sensitive. It takes so little to set such minds thinking on the wrong track."

"But have you no idea what might have

happened, Mattie? This lady I have met who is, she says, Jessie Weaver, is so—so lovely and sweet——"

"Yes, Jessie was always lovely and sweet," Mattie interrupted. "But they are the very kind most sensitive and hardest to reason with."

"I suppose that's so," Tony replied vaguely. "But Mattie, you understand, we are not to say one word to Dad? We might spoil things."

"I shan't say anything. I shouldn't want to get him worked up about this, anyhow, when it may never amount to anything."

"But, Mattie Potter, it's got to amount to something," Tony declared, again nearly sweeping Mattie's bricabrac into smithereens with her flapping sleeves. "Think I'm going to let this go on forever, like the brook? No, Mattie-love; girls of today aren't—aren't so easily satisfied," she finished rather lamely for a girl of today, because, as a matter of fact, she was so excited she didn't know exactly what she was saying.

Mattie smiled now. Tony was the same baby she had always been; so easily excited, so enthusiastic over things she especially wanted; and then boasting about being a girl of today.

"Well, dear, all I can say is, you really have made a discovery. I have always been on the lookout for Jessie; wondering why she acted so and wondering if she would ever cross Tom's path again. But it seems you did find her, even if she is lost again."

"But not for long," Tony declared warmly. "I know I can depend upon old Bill Ryan's word, and he promised I should hear soon. Of course, he knows the whole thing, only he can't tell. I suppose."

"He must be the family coachman I have heard Tom speak of," Mattie recalled. "The Weavers lived in style in New York some years ago, when Jessie and your mother Mary were tiny little girls. Your mother married a poor man."

"I'm glad she did," Tony broke in loyally. "Anyhow she had me and I love her yet, but there's Jessie. Who has she got to love her?"

Mattie looked at Tom's picture on her dresser, the one that was taken for the government inspection books. But she only shook her head.

CHAPTER XVII

THE OLD, OLD STORY

ONE little clue Mattie gave Tony before they finished the long talk about Tom and Jessie. It seemed, there was a girl named Ann Higgins in those earlier days, and Ann made no secret of her preference for the good looking Tom. Until Jessie Weaver, the young singer came down to stop at the big hotel, Tom rather favored Ann, but after Jessie came Ann was slighted and Tom took her no place at all. Neither did he bother with her when she called to see Mattie, as she often did.

"Well," Mattie was saying now as she recalled this to Tony, "Ann grew very bitter. She talked back and forth and really tried to make trouble. Maybe she succeeded. Certainly she tried hard enough."

"And people can twist things so," Tony joined in, eager to take the blame from Tom and Jessie. "I know, even the girls at school make a lot of trouble sometimes. Did Jessie sing then, when she was just a young girl? I mean, did people call her a singer?"

"Oh yes; everyone called her the young singer from New York, while she stopped at the hotel. There was an aunt or some older relative with her. I forget just who it was. And I remember one thing that seemed to have something to do with her and Tom. She was going to sing for a little charity affair, in the hall. Local people were always getting up affairs in summer to help pay for things they would have to help out with in the winter. So Jessie was going to sing.

"Tom was all excited about it. He got out posters with her name on, and he was as proud as a peacock, having his girl the real concert singer for the benefit. And at the last minute the piano didn't come. She wouldn't or couldn't sing without the piano, and there was a great fuss. Of course, Tom felt dreadfully. The concert didn't come off, and I remember it was after that that she and Tom separated."

"That was awful," Tony agreed. "Especially after the posters and everything. I can just imagine how Dad would feel. But that Ann, who, you thought, made the trouble, couldn't have had anything to do with that?"

"Yes indeed she did, for it was her brother who was to move the piano from the school to the hall. Tom depended upon him to do

it; thought it was done until the very last minute. Then, the school was locked and Ann's brother who had the key wasn't even around any place. Had gone off on some little out of town excursion," Mattie concluded scornfully.

"That was just it, I'll bet," Tony promptly decided. "Surely that would make both Tom and Jessie feel terribly bad. Well, Auntie Mattie," and she did what Mattie knew she would do before this long, long, conference would really break up, she gave Mattie a good hug as a promise of their secrecy, "I'm going to do all I can to help them straighten things out. It seems so much nicer for older folks, like Tom and Jessie, to get their home and be happy together, than it does for young people who can fight their own battles. You'll help me, won't you, Mattie?" Tony was in love with the very idea.

"I don't see how *we* can do anything to bring them together again. Certainly *we* couldn't interfere," Mattie remonstrated.

"You know what girls do, Mattie-love. They do a lot of things that the experienced ones shy clear of." She was warning Mattie now.

"But you wouldn't interfere in a thing like that, dear," Mattie protested. "It wouldn't

be wise. That affair is entirely one to be settled by Tom and Jessie."

"Exactly, love," and Tony did a very silly little dance with her kimono flying wildly. "Just as I said before. We girls don't *know* when we are interfering, and so we often jump right in where you angels fear to tread. But I know you're dying to get to bed again. I'm dreadful to have talked so long."

"Mercy! Just look at the time!"

"But look at all the big things we have talked over. And remember, it's all a big secret."

"You are not going to mention this to Ted?"

"Oh no. I wouldn't do that. That would be too personal. Tom is our—Tom. I wouldn't talk much about him to Ted. I did talk of losing Aunt Jessie. I couldn't help that when this stranger acted so mysteriously at our stand."

"I know you will try to be wise, Tony," Mattie cautioned. "But you must always put yourself, if you can, in the place of the person whose affairs are being discussed. Then you'll know, probably, how far to go."

"Yes, I understand. Do unto others, etc.," Tony answered glibly. "But it's fun, just the same. And if Tom and Jessie ever become lovers again, I'm sure as a gun he won't bother

any more about taking a trip around the world in an airship." Tony scorned that idea and her voice showed she did.

It was a day or two later that Ted brought up an entirely new matter, one that hadn't a thing to do with Tony's tiresome second hand romance. There were, of course, many more stands along the great highway than that managed by Ted and Tony. There were a few set quite far back, on a little tail of the road that ran into the woods, up any place, and it was about one of these old fashioned farming stands that Ted had all the exciting news for Tony.

"A girl named Virginia Blair keeps a stand out Willow Hollow way," Ted was explaining, "and you just ought to hear the ghost yarn. She wants us, you and me, to go out and help her run the ghost down. It seems this particular ghost is too fond of Virginia's tomatoes."

"Oh, goody," cried Tony. "I've been dying for a ghost scare. Haven't had one in ages. When does this friend spook perform?"

"Often. Every night, I imagine. We're to go over and play detective first night we shut down early. I imagine you are willing to go, and be lambasted by spooked tomatoes."

"Willing? I'm dying to. You make the arrangements and just count me in. I'll be there," sang out Tony, who was polishing a red apple until it looked like the wax fruit used for table center pieces. Which brings us to another story about wayside stands along the Jersey shore.

Now it was all very well for Virginia Blair to be high-hat in her own home town, but down on her grandfather's farm it didn't get her anywhere. The slang was applied figuratively to Virginia, for as a matter of fact, she wasn't a bit that way; she was merely secretly shy, but it passed for high-hatness and she liked it better that way, although really she didn't like it at all.

Her mother had warned her—how mothers can warn! If she went to the farm again she must not be above selling those lovely vegetables her grandfather and grandmother delighted in raising and passing motorists loved to buy. But she really should go to the shore hotel with the Miller girls, her mother argued, and have a change and an assured good time. Why didn't she?

"But I detest hotels," Virginia had loftily answered.

"And you've never been to one," pointed out

the discerning mother. Her mother guessed why she didn't want to go. Again, aren't mothers the best little guessers ever?

She also hated to be called Ginny, and she hated to hear her grandfather called Gramp —there were a lot of things Virginia hated, as well as handing out the front-porch vegetables to effusive motorists. But all the same, she was down on the farm again and it was quite likely she would not escape these little details she so frankly confessed she positively loathed.

If only she could have known? But she didn't know, and when her best things were once more hung in the neatly arranged little closet at the old homestead, and she, herself, was once more arranged on the little side porch of the well kept up, if rather small, white farmhouse, she tried to forget the Miller girls at that attractive shore hotel, where things happened every minute, very likely.

"And it *is* so deadly dull here! Well, I'm getting just what I deserve, I suppose," she admitted ruefully. "If I only make friends in books I must live in books, and all the fun I'll ever get will be the fun of pretending I'm someone in a book." She sighed heavily under that thought, because Virginia really read too many books.

Not very satisfactory. Never before had she realized the penalty of that self-conscious vanity; never before had she been a girl just fifteen. Now, the hours at her grandparents' farm were dragging like years. Sunny days or rainy days, dark nights or moonlit nights, it was all the same, unbearably lonely. Too late now to think of the good times she had forfeited at the shore hotel with the Miller girls; too late even to make friends with the country girls she had ignored other summers. She did, however, make friends later; this was the way things were when she came first.

But now she took refuge in her book, as usual, carrying it to her own special chair on the porch.

A roadster was whirring in the driveway and instantly the girl's cheeks burned. That inescapable shyness! But how could she know her cheeks were prettier that way when they stung so!

"'Lo there! Any rags, any bottles, any bones!" The chant ceased as the boy discovered Virginia. "Oh!" He wore no hat to raise. "You keeping store? I'd like a big basket of potatoes. This one looks all right." It hadn't taken him long to jump out and select a basket from the small row. "You see, I'm a regular customer. Just tell Gramp

Newberry that Sid Rowland called. He trusts me. And I'm in a hurry." He seemed to be. "Thanks," he called back foolishly as he jumped in the car. "I'm going to corner the market on potatoes. Glad to see Mr. Newberry has a lady clerk at last. I always told him—— S'long! See you later!"

Hadn't she spoken! Not a word! But he hadn't given her a chance. Yet, he had been polite enough. She hurried to peek in the kitchen looking-glass. Thank goodness her hair had looked all right. As if that mattered.

"See you made a sale, Ginny." Her grandfather, his fine old face suffused with one great smile, stood in the doorway.

"I didn't make it. That was Sid Rowland, so he said, and he took a basket of potatoes."

"He would. That's just like Sid. A fine fellow. Smart too!"

"He seemed to be—smart," Virginia was being sarcastic.

"Sure is. There's the store book, Ginny. Chalk down your sale. Sid Rowland, one basket pots. We'll know what that means. See his nice car? And he's a nice boy too. His folks have got plenty of money, but they're right about teaching their boy to get his money's worth. He drives out here to

get supplies for his camp when the other fellows just pick up stuff anywhere at any price."

Virginia had taken the pencil that dangled on its string by the little brown store-book, and she was writing down the sale. "Sid Rowland—one basket pots."

"Pretty quiet for you out here now, Ginny," her grandfather continued, as he let himself sink into the rocker, first having tossed his big sunhat at the sleeping cat: "Wonder you didn't want to go off with the other girls this summer?"

"Oh, I like to be quiet. I can read up my school stuff——"

"Too much reading is 'bout as bad as too little. Gets queer notions in young folks' heads. Well, hope you sell *all* our potatoes," the grandfather quickly digressed. "We *could* use the money." He chuckled aloud at his little joke, threw a ball of newspaper at that unwakable cat, and then sank deeper in his big chair, for a nap of his own.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HAUNTED STAND

THUS circumstances seemed conspiring to make a saleslady out of the unwilling girl. Plainly she could not reasonably seem above handing out those baskets of potatoes, those nice little baskets of tomatoes, or those well-washed deep red beets. But the task was hateful to her. She hated to meet strangers, she hated their over-friendly way of addressing her, as if it didn't matter, she objected, as if formality didn't count when one sold garden stuff. And she hated the feel of accepting strangers' money for members of her family, if not actually for herself. It was somehow humiliating, embarrassing and so dreadfully conspicuous, she thought. How different this girl from Ted and Tony?

That was it. The whole idea conflicted with her shyness. It most certainly did drag her out of her shell. A high price to pay for selling vanity—the price of her peace of mind, of her contentment—almost of her hap-

piness, for Virginia was by no means happy at her grandfather's farm this year.

She took her book now and sought that little seat in the big willow tree by the brook, only to find it no longer cozy there. The tree had too many little new branches; they closed in around the bent crotch and spoiled her old seat. And the singing brook sang childish songs, while the bees and bugs were just a nuisance. She was being peevish, and she knew it.

"Oh, dear," she grumbled, "I hate it here. I certainly should have gone with the Miller girls. I wish I hadn't been so silly about strange places and strange people."

Admitting that much was a hopeful sign. She usually declared she just hated hotels; now she was telling herself why. Only telling *herself,* of course, but even that was something. A fault admitted is a fault half corrected; so folks say.

Then a few friendly little raindrops pattering on the brook gave an excuse, and Virginia hurried back toward the porch.

There was a car in the driveway! Well, a car was better than nothing. And yes, it *was* Sid Rowland's!

"Oh, hullo! I've been waiting for you."

"Oh hullo! I've been——"

"Go ahead, be nice, say it. Say I've been watching for you. It sounds like a song or something. Besides, you should have been watching for the price of those potatoes."

In her confusion, laughing was real refuge, and so she took shelter behind its innocent screen. Sid laughed with her; he could laugh easily, any time at anything or at nothing if he wished, it appeared. No wonder boys grow brave and strong; they are so naturally free from the many pestiferous little fears and fancies that beset poor, selfconscious Virginias.

"I've been thinking," he professed when the gale of laughter had subsided and he had seated his long self on the top step of the porch, crosswise. "You know my folks don't believe that *I* can earn money. They have that absurd notion in spite of all my profitable investments. Now, I made double on that basket of potatoes, and if I do say it myself, and my grandmother says it too; Gran's a brick——"

"Say what?" broke in Virginia mercifully.

"That I'm a born produce dealer, peddler, in other words. But all joking aside," he crossed his knees the other way and made diamonds out of the squares on his golf stockings, "I've got a scheme. Let's do it while your

folks are away. Let's take over the haunted stand!"

That was how Virginia's experience started. But she didn't know a thing then about Ted and Tony; she hadn't been out exploring her surroundings until sometime after Sid broke in upon her reveries. She didn't even appreciate how much it meant to have a boy like Sid Rowland drag her out of her silly little vanity shell. She should have had to do it all alone, like the other girls. Then she would have known how well off she was. But, at any rate, Sid was, as he said, "right on the job," and he was coaxing Virginia along.

"What are you talking about?" Virginia asked him. "What haunted stand?"

"Oh, that's so; you don't know about it. Well, that stand down by the old elm is haunted!"

"How silly!"

"Isn't it? But it is. Surest thing. They had a good business there a couple of years ago, and biff: the ghost: no more biz. Closed up tight. And here's the idea. Please don't interrupt; I gotta hurry. The idea is, I know the owner, he knows my dad, and if you'll supply the produce, while your folks are down to the state fair—— They're going, aren't they?"

"Yes, I want them to and they may be away two weeks. Nettie will be here with me."

"Sure. Two weeks. That's fine. The more the merrier. Anyhow, I'll guarantee to sell all your stuff on a good profit, if you'll go in partnership and we open up shop under the sign of the Haunted Wayside Stand! Gosh! I'm outta breath!"

Again they both laughed. Virginia couldn't help it and Sid didn't try. Finally he made her understand why he wanted to go into business, to "prove to his folks that he could do something." And while Virginia did not at once agree, she was finally won over —he had a most convincing way—and she was to have Nettie's sister Emma help her with the work at the haunted stand, including shooing the ghost, Sid had especially specified. Since Emma wanted to spend some time at the farm and Emma refused to live in idleness, this seemed a most amicable arrangement as it turned out to be, eventually.

And a little later, to see her and Emma smiling to customers under the big sign "Haunted," no one could have guessed that this was the girl who had so hated to sell vegetables. The sign was, as Sid promised it would be, enough to draw customers from the clouds, as well as from the roadside, he

being one of those up-to-date youths who do not believe in being late and, as he said, he was having an eye on the airship trade in the clouds. That sign could be seen for a long distance either way.

And how he did polish apples, and shave carrots and bob cabbages! And how his friends from everywhere—he had so many apparently—did flock to that stand to buy stuff! Although it was away out in the woods.

It had all been done so quickly that Virginia felt dazed. *She* was actually in charge of a real wayside stand! And the capable Emma was so happy at her part of it, that she brought lunch and supper and wouldn't go back to the house to partake of Nettie's fine cooking—not if she could get out of it. She just stuck there and attended to business.

And it was fun. Something new happening all the time, but the most popular occurrence was the autoists demanding to know about how, when and what was the stand haunted with. To answer that the proprietors had a regular and consistent story. Sid rehearsed it and even Emma almost stuck to it. It was simple enough. Certainly the stand was haunted. The owner had to give it up last year. Certainly no one had ever seen the ghost, if they had—— Certainly they had

heard it, lots of people had—there. That was that.

"All well enough for strangers," Virginia told Sid, "but I want to know the truth. Is this stand haunted or isn't it?"

"What difference does it make? Aren't we coining money under the proud banner of that haunt?"

"Oh, I know all that," she replied impatiently. "But there must be some story in it. What is it?"

"Thought you didn't believe in ghosts?"

Always like that. Virginia never could get any satisfaction, and Emma merely laughed at the idea. She was a fine, healthy country girl, who might easily have a good time with a jolly young ghost—are they ever young? But Virginia was romantic, dramatic, even. Her reading left no escape from such emotions, and now that the success of their venture was well established, she was out after the scalp of the ghost.

It was about this time that Ted had heard about the haunted stand out Willow Hollow way. Some boys who stopped for soda one afternoon were talking about the queer sign, "Haunted," that Sid had put over the place, and these boys knew Sid. It was easy enough for Ted to find out what it was all about, and

when Sid stopped a day later she knew who he was and he told her a lot more.

"Wish you two girls would come out and meet Virginia," he politely invited Ted. "She's an awfully nice girl, but shy as anything. But I know she would like to meet you. By the way," he went on stopping in the act of his soda drinking, "I know a boy who knows you. He was at the Lake with your crowd last summer: Alan Campbell."

"Alan Campbell!" Ted fairly cried out. "Do you know Alan?"

"Do I?" Sid answered. And from that instant she was a friend of Sid's, for she and Alan Campbell had been wonderful pals all that last summer, and their queer experiences at the big lake resort made up the story called: A Girl Called Ted.

So it was very natural that she should have been glad to meet a friend of Alan's. And besides this, Sid was a boy anyone might want to meet for his own attractive points. Every one liked Sid Rowland.

Ted praised him to the skies when she told Tony all about it, and she was sure Tony would have a great old lark running down the squawking ghost. Sid told her it squawked and she told Tony.

Sid had agreed to come around some night

with a broom or something and "lay for it," with Virginia, but it didn't happen that way. Ghosts are proverbially tricky and never act up according to schedule.

The first hint of its presence came from a party of motorists, who declared they had been around the night before and had heard the most awful strangling noises. They honestly thought someone was being choked to death, but for some inexplainable reason they had not bothered to call the police.

Sid mused. Virginia thrilled. The ghost! At last! Was acting up.

"Likes tomatoes. Dibs, at our camp, says it always comes in tomato season. We gotta watch our stuff," declared Sid waggishly.

Then Virginia remembered. Yes, a basket of tomatoes had been upset the night before. She found some of them right in front of the old drain pipe. How could they have gotten there? The drain pipe was just outside the stand and the tomatoes were or had been just inside.

"Perfectly silly!" she scoffed to Sid. "Tomatoes!"

"Now, Ginny——"

"Please don't call me that!"

"Oh, all right." He flushed and dropped one of the prettiest apples. It got a bad bruise

from the shelf and had to be thrown in Nettie's big galvanized pail. "Sorry. I'll try to remember—Vir-gin-ia. But Ginny's cute," he boyishly insisted. "I like it. Kinda chummy."

She was sorry instantly. It *was* cute; chummy, friendly. And there, she had snubbed her best friend. Demanding a name. Force of habit; bad habit, had made her critical. The little episode had completely sidetracked their ghost story.

"Well, Miss Virginia," he attempted again in a mocking tone, "ever see that nice green stand out at the fork in the road?"

"You mean the one two girls keep?"

"That's the one. Well, I know those two girls; Ted Layton and Tony Potter, and they're coming down here to meet you. Nice girls——"

"Why should they want to meet me?"

"Maybe they don't." Sid was not going to flatter her. She was too selfcentered. "But they want to meet our ghost, so *I've* asked them down."

"Oh, all right," Virginia agreed, even then putting her hand to her hair in preparation. "I've noticed that stand. It seems the best around here."

"Sure is," Sid declared warmly, "and

they're mighty nice kids that run it. Tony, she's the little dark one, has an old horse she calls Major, and it's fun to meet them coming along the road. Major seems to feel he should give an auto the whole road, and when one comes his way he just tries to get on the side walk," Sid laughingly related. "He sure is some horse. All right, Vir-gin-ia," he wound up. "See you later."

Very likely Virginia managed it herself, but it so happened she drove out to the Green Stand shortly after. A customer, with a car, had come to her for fresh eggs, and Virginia not having any, suggested they go to the Green Stand. It was then she met Ted. Ted at once told her about Sid asking them out to shoo ghosts, and, in her frank way, Ted very promptly took Virginia on as one of her own chums.

"Isn't it wonderful to be in business?" she asked the wide-eyed Virginia. "I just love it. Don't know how I'll ever settle down to old school stuff again. These eggs just came in this morning."

And that was how Virginia met the girls.

Then the next thing Virginia knew Sid was gone away. Gone away to meet his folks somewhere! And there were just Emma with Nettie occasionally to help with that stand.

She would miss Sid. No one could help liking him. He knew so much about everything, or was it merely her unbounded confidence in his easy-going ways? Well, her grandparents would be home next week and the girls from the Green Stand had stopped down once or twice. Tony loved the old stand in the woods and was just crazy about the ghost story.

There was such good news in store for Virginia's folks when they would return from their trip. Every bit of available produce had been sold daily, even to the precious fresh eggs that Nettie insisted upon presenting as her contribution to the attractions of the haunted wayside stand, and which never quite met the orders.

CHAPTER XIX

A BUSY GHOST

BUT gradually more and better stories drifted in from the customers who happened by on dark nights. There were noises, really. Shrieks, moans, groans—and all the other regulation ghostly nuances—they had all been heard by a number of people. Virginia still professed not to believe them, but all the same, she found herself waiting for Emma to go with her to open up of mornings, and she made it a point not to be there alone when night would be coming on.

"It's just all bunk," Emma declared one evening when everything was quiet but the katydids. "Let's go around and listen for the old ghost. I feel just like doin' sumpin' terrible." She did something terrible in the way of a few dance steps right there on the porch. Emma was always good company.

"But it's almost dark now," demurred Virginia. "And it's sort of lonely——"

"You're not really afraid!"

"Oh, no. I'll go." She wasn't going to be

a coward. "We really ought to run down that ghost before the folks get back."

"We certainly should," Emma agreed. She was so enthused over the success of their market that she could talk of nothing else, except to mention the ghost occasionally. But she did manage to tell Virginia that some boys from Camp Noquit,—Sid's camp, had been by that afternoon and they said Sid would be back for the week end.

"Oh, that's good!" exclaimed Virginia frankly. "I'd hate the week-end trade alone."

"But *we,* you and I have got to carry on that business," interrupted Emma, sensibly. "Can't expect a boy of his means to bother with our affairs."

"But he started it!"

"Just to show his folks. But it's up to us now. Well, what do you say? Shall we go ghost hunting?"

"I promised the two girls at the Green Stand to let them know when we heard anything that looked encouraging," Virginia told Emma, "and I feel we should let them know if we are going over."

"Isn't this their funny old cart coming now? I heard someone call Major."

"Oh, yes," exclaimed Virginia happily. "Isn't that luck!"

"Hey there!" called out Ted. "We were going out for some fresh early corn. Want to come along?"

"And we were going ghost hunting," Emma answered, while Virginia, slow as usual, was making up her mind what to say. "Come along. We hear there's lots of spookiness going on these nights."

"Oh, fine!" Tony agreed promptly. "Where can I tie my fiery steed?"

Major was made as happy as a horse like him could be made, then the party started off down the dark road to the old spooky stand.

Tony and Ted were so full of laughter it was hard for them to appreciate Virginia's mood, for she really was a little timid. But after some direct warnings from Emma, that they would have to keep quiet if they wanted any fun, they both finally managed to choke back their bubbling mirth.

"Let's get out on the road," Virginia suggested. "I don't like it in here under the trees."

They all agreed, Emma teasing as she did so. Virginia was being afraid of ghosts after all.

"Listen!"

"Hark!"

They all exclaimed. There was a noise—a strange something——

"Oh, come on!" begged Virginia, tugging at Emma's arm. "Isn't that—an awful sound!"

"But wait! What is it?" Ted or Tony or both insisted. They were trying to hide under the low wild cherry tree, that brushed the sides of the stand. It was dreary enough now even the brave girls would have admitted, with everything all closed up and no sign of traffic or other humans around. Tony giggled softly, but Ted pinched her arm in warning.

They waited, listened. Virginia was actually trembling. Emma never trembled, she was the kind that rushes fearlessly, if not always wisely, into the thick of the fray. She was trying to get into it now. The other girls held back. It wasn't their ghost.

"There it is again! Oh, Emma! Come on! It's terrible and we're so alone——"

"Not quite all alone," said Emma dryly, "for someone or something is making that noise. And there's an awful choke in it——"

Gently shaking off Virginia's restraining hand, Emma stepped in nearer to the apparent location from whence the queer sounds were emanating. It kept up intermittently

and it didn't sound any pleasanter as it progressed. Tony would have gone with Emma but Ted held her back.

"It's back—by the tomato table," Emma turned to tell them, in a hushed voice.

"But don't—please don't raise the shutter," begged the now thoroughly frightened Virginia, her voice quaking as she made the plea. For if Emma should raise the shutter why shouldn't the squawking ghost fly at them all?

Emma would not attempt to oppose Virginia too strongly. Her sister, Nettie, was merely in the employ of Virginia's folks, and so Emma felt loyally obligated to take orders.

"Don't be so frightened. I won't go in," she agreed then. "It *is* pretty dark and we didn't bring flash lights though we should have. It's stopped now. Maybe it died," she giggled, horrifying the timid girl who once more had regained her clasp on Emma's trusty right arm.

Ted and Tony rushed out from their shelter and joined Virginia.

"Wasn't that weird?" Tony exclaimed. "But it's stopped dead now. What can it have been?"

"Why don't we open up the stand and find out?" Ted demanded sensibly.

"Oh, no. Please don't ask us to do that,"

begged Virginia. "You see, my folks are away——"

"And we've promised to be so good," Emma chimed in, "that we wouldn't dare go as far as that. But we'll get him next time. We'll come earlier."

"Or we'll bring Sid along," suggested Virginia.

"Sid!" shrieked Tony. "Why can he do more than we could?"

"Well, you see, it's his stand, we're in partnership," Virginia evaded. Whereat Ted and Tony choked back more laughter.

"And here's poor old Major as meek as Moses," cooed Tony as they again reached the spot where her rig was parked. "Climb in folks. You'll find room in the rumble seat," she joked, for there was a contrivance for an extra seat in the back of the queer old cart.

They were quite a distance down the road before they spoke of the ghost noise. For two reasons. Because they were listening and because they were bumping up and down just as Major felt like bumping them.

"Of course it's no ghost——," said Emma finally quite casually, when she got a chance. "But what is it? That's the question."

"No animal could make that queer sound," Virginia followed.

"No, I've gone over them all," Tony chimed in. "And I never heard one make that sort of noise. I'll admit that. Have you ever Ted?"

"It certainly was—uncanny," admitted Ted. "And I can't say I recognized it as anything I ever heard before."

"And it stopped so suddenly. Might have heard us talking," Tony went on.

"Are you sure Sid is coming back for the week end?" Virginia asked Emma.

"So one of the boys said. But we couldn't expect him to jump in and work," demurred Emma.

"No, I wasn't thinking of that. I was just thinking he might—lay the ghost," Virginia laughed easily now; they were near home and so were safe from any more weird influence.

When they got to Virginia's house, the girls declined her invitation to go in for a while. They still had that fresh corn to get.

"Why don't you come along?" Ted urged. "We get pretty good golden bantam corn now. It's little and young, but some people like it!"

"Oh, no, thanks," Virginia answered. "I don't want any more stuff to sell tomorrow. If Sid isn't back, I'll have enough to do to sell what's on hand."

"And I've got to help at home to get ready

for the folks coming back," Emma joined in, "so I can't be with her much."

"All right, sorry," Tony answered, as she gave Major a little prompting flip with her willow whip.

"But promise you won't go after the ghost again without letting us know?" begged Ted.

"Call up on the phone and we'll be over as quickly as Major can lug us here," added Tony, who was having a real lark and only hoped there would be a lot more of it.

"All right," called out Virginia. "I'm awfully glad you could come over tonight. And next time maybe we'll have something more exciting."

Both parties had seemed to enjoy the little excitement. Ted and Tony were glad to have met Virginia and she, in turn, was glad, really glad to know them. For Virginia too was now a little stand operator, and just doing something had greatly increased her self confidence. But now she was determined to run the ghost down, if for no other purpose than to give Ted and Tony the promised good time.

CHAPTER XX

RUNNING IT DOWN

BECAUSE Virginia was the newest stand keeper, her business seemed the most important. And since she had met Ted and Tony she got to comparing notes, figuring out just how much she made and estimating how much more she could make, and wondering how much the other girls made.

It was the evening after the little ghost hunt that she sat on her porch, pad and pencil in hand when Sid's car swung merrily into the driveway.

Her heart fluttered and her cheeks flushed. She had grown to like this honest impulsive boy—to like him as a girl of her type will, feeling at ease in his company, feeling a confidence in his straightforward sincerity, and feeling a real deep sense of admiration for his natural business tact. All this completely submerged the personal element, and was so entirely free from any possibility of criticism, that even Virginia, in her self-centered shell, now forgot to be shy with Sid.

"Countin' up?" he greeted her, ignoring the less important formalities. "That's what I came around for. How much did we make?"

"We have cleared——" she paused to make the announcement more impressive, and cleft her chin with her pencil as an appropriate gesture, "we have cleared up to tonight, forty-two dollars! Can you believe it?"

"Sure I can. It was all clear profit. We didn't have any expense. But it's fine, just the same. Won't the folks be tickled?"

"Oh, they'll be so surprised——"

"So was my dad and my mother. They're coming around tomorrow with their market-basket. Save some good stuff; especially tomatoes. Our cook says she can't keep enough on hand."

"Tomatoes! What do you think, Sid? We heard our tomato ghost last night!"

"Who did?"

"Ted and Tony and Emma and I. Honestly, Sid, it made dreadful noises——"

"Good! The girls came around then? Wonder would the old spook make the noises for me? What time did he perform?"

"Oh, you think I'm joking——"

"Don't either. I'm the one that's joking. I want to get a line on that ghost. Business first; biz is all attended to. Good profit,

fine prospect etc. and so forth. Now for pleasure. Let's go ghost hunting." He jumped up and stood waiting for Virgina. "Come along. I gotta get back with the boys. Suppose it's too light to expect the ghost to walk?" he asked facetiously.

"But listen, Sid, please," begged Virginia. "The girls came over last night and we had a lot of fun——"

"Was the ghost so funny?"

"Oh, listen Sid. I promised to let the girls know when we really investigated the crazy thing."

"Sure thing, let them know. Hop in now and we'll spin over and get them. I'm going to dig out that old ghost tonight if we have to tear the old dingus down to the ground. Come along, Ginny. Hop in. I'm in a hurry."

Virginia took a little time, little time as she regarded it—to get ready and hop in Sid's roadster. Then they flew across the country roads, found Ted and Tony both together at Ted's bungalow, and before the easy going Virginia had time to wonder what it was all about, they were all on their way back to the haunted stand.

"Of course nothing ever happens when you

want it to," Virginia reminded them. "But let's try it anyhow."

"You bet we'll try it," Sid declared, "and I pity that old ghost if he gets too gay."

They all talked of the exciting possibilities as they sped along in Sid's roadster, and while it was only a short distance, twilight was deepening quickly, and it was quite dusk when they cautiously slowed up by the big elm.

"Better not go too close with the car," Sid remarked. "Not every ghost is up-to-date enough to appreciate a real roadster. Ahem!" and he pretended to pat his own little green car.

"Let us go around the side," Tony proposed, when a noise of some kind arrested their attention.

"There it is!" breathed Virginia, rather glad not to disappoint Sid and the girls. "Like something choking——"

"That's no choking, it's sort of——" But he could not define it, and it was changing momentarily.

They all stood there listening. The noise was sort of swishing, then something like a cough——"

"It's over there," whispered Sid, "over there by the gutter."

"That ghost is a ventriloquist——" Ted stopped suddenly, for the noise assumed those choking sounds that had so startled everyone who had heard it.

"I'm going in back," the boy declared. "Whatever it is——"

"But Sid! It might be a lunatic!" Virginia warned.

"Well, if it is I'll just put a basket over his head——"

"But Sid!" Ted now entreated. "You can't go in there alone. I'll go with you!"

"Hurrah for Ted!" Sid dared to say but not to shout, while the choking noises changed to a queer deep-toned gurgling. It certainly kept going.

"But I won't go in. You stay with me, Tony," Virginia begged, for Tony too wanted to go inside. "I'll be out here all alone!"

Meanwhile Sid was cautiously unlocking the small door that opened into the passage back of the front counter. It was dark everywhere now, and very dark in there, and those guttural sounds were not encouraging. Even Ted at his elbow, would have admitted that.

But he persisted, and no sooner had he opened the door—a good big stick in his hand, while Ted flourished another—than the wildest sort of commotion set up within.

"IT'S OVER THERE," WHISPERED SID.

Ted and Tony.

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"Come out! Come out!" begged Virginia in actual alarm. "You'll both be killed!" Was their joke turning into a tragedy! Was it a real ghost hunt after all!

"Keep still, Virginia," Tony urged. "Don't get so excited."

"Here! Here! Get out of there!" they heard Sid yelling, while the resounding whacks of his stick on the pine boards, cut treacherously through the air.

Ted too was busy with her club, and she made almost as much noise with it as Sid did with his.

A passing motor brought a little gasp of relief to Virginia. But no, she couldn't stop it and it flew by unmindful of the commotion within the darkened stand.

"Hey! Hey! Look at this!" But Sid's voice was not filled with terror, on the contrary, it was filled with glee! "Hey Ginny!" he called forgetting to be good. "Lookit—here!"

And then he brought forth the ghost. A great big gray goose, that flapped its wings all over Sid's features and squawked wildly now —it was no longer choking.

Virginia's relief was so sudden she just couldn't laugh.

Ted and Tony simply yelled in glee.

"That!" they exclaimed incredulously.

"Yes, that," replied Sid, between flaps and squawks. "And he certainly does like tomatoes. He upset the whole basket."

"But how did he make that queer awful noise?" Virginia wanted to know instantly. She had recovered her breath and with it her courage.

Then they all talked, for Sid wouldn't give up the ghost and he couldn't talk and hold on to it. Ted tried to explain how the unused drain pipe had acted as a sounding horn, and how the tomatoes just tumbled down into the hollow by the pipe. When the old gray goose went after a tomato, he stuck his head right in the iron pipe. And biff! The terrible choking, strangling noise that actually came out in the gutter where the pipe ended!

"Only that! How silly!" scoffed Virginia who seemed actually disappointed.

"Only that!" echoed Sid. "I'll say that's enough." He was still trying to hold the indignant goose. "You should have seen him fight for his old tomatoes!"

"Let him go," called Tony, "he'll peck you! Look out!" The warning was given just in time, for the old gray goose wouldn't stand Sid's restraint another moment, and he made that plain. So with a flourish, intended to

make sure that the goose didn't drag him or some part of his clothing along with his gooseship on his flight, Sid tossed the big bird up in the air, only to see him flop down in a tail spin like a disabled airship.

It took some time for the girls and Sid to impart to Virginia all the details of their capture, as well as to explain why the goose made such an unearthly noise. But it was plain enough that the old bird did really love the big juicy tomatoes, and every time one would roll into the mouth of the pipe, he would just stick his long beak in after it. The tomato, not being easily recaptured even by the big beak, would roll farther in the pipe, hence all the strangling, choking and sinister noises that went through the long iron pipe in a weird, magnified tone.

"But we mustn't give it away," Sid warned the girls. "That old goose is the best ghost that ever worked up a good business. Coming next year, Ginny?"

They were ready to go home now; for as usual, Ted and Tony had some business to attend to before calling the day's work done. But every one of them declared this was the season's very best joke, and even Virginia had to admit that the old gray goose was a wonder.

CHAPTER XXI

LOST, STRAYED, OR STOLEN

AFTER exposing the old gray goose as a genuine fraud, but giving him credit for bringing good business to the Haunted Stand, the girls found themselves a company of three, with chain stands of two, and the possibility "of broad expansion," as Ted expressed it.

"Of course, Virginia thinks she can't do anything without Sid, but she's fooling herself," Ted went on telling the interested member of her own firm, namely Tony Potter. "Chances are Sid will slip away without even saying goodbye. Boys are so awfully important to themselves," she commented critically. "I know all about it. We had a lot of boys at the mountain camp last summer. Virginia better get a girl to sign up as a partner if she wants someone to stick."

"But I don't imagine she has any interest at all in her stand," Tony replied. "She's just doing it to please her family."

"That's a good enough reason. I did this

to please Nannie, and look where it got me!" Ted threw her two young arms out in a gesture that encompassed, not only the stand and its fruits, vegetables and flowers (there were lovely young gladioli today,) but it was as if she also swung her scepter over quite a portion of the universe.

"Let's run down after our swim and see what she's doing," Tony suggested. "Wonder why we never meet her at the beach."

"She's a shy kid; maybe just country, but I imagine she's too booky. I never knew a girl yet who read too much who wasn't as self conscious as a gold fish," Ted declared. "But as you say, Tony, we'll go down this afternoon, and find out whether she's mourning for Sid or just selling green apples to green customers."

And a few hours later they found Virginia was doing both.

"Not gone?" Tony repeated sympathetically. "Don't mean to tell us Sid has gone without even saying goodbye to us?" This was sheer mockery, of course, but she felt she had to say something appropriate.

"Yes," sighed Virginia. She had not yet become acquainted with the rollicking ways of Ted and Tony, and she took their speeches seriously. "I do think he might have stayed

——But, of course, he's getting ready for college——"

"So are we, aren't *you,* Virgie?" Ted demanded.

"Oh, I don't know——"

"Certainly you are," Tony answered for her. "Mean to say you are going to let all *this* education go to waste? Why, Ted is going to be an engineer, I'm going to be a detective——do they have colleges for detectives? And why don't you be a chef? Wouldn't it be perfectly delightful to boss a kitchen in a big hotel——"

"I *loathe* cooking."

"Not really!" Tony matched Virginia in assumed airs. "Then we'll make it something else. But it's got to be new and therefore not girlish. That's why we have boys' names. Don't you think they're awfully handy?"

"Yes, they're cute——"

"Don't, Virgie dear, please don't say cute. We *loathe* being cute. But no fooling. Why don't you come down to the beach in the afternoons? Tide is wonderful now; good for swimming——"

"I don't care much for bathing. Of course, I go in. Grandpa is so keen on it and feels I need a lot of it." Virginia was pretty; she looked lovely now, and neither Ted nor Tony

exactly blamed her for not taking any chances with the ocean waves and a head of hair like that. It was so beautifully done in little crinkles, every one as even as a patched quilt. Then, there was her complexion. Soft as peach down and just as beautifully clear. But, of course, none of these charming attributes looked anything like a good old summer time.

"You close your stand awfully early, don't you?" Ted remarked, for Virginia was on the old homestead porch, which meant the stand was shut down for the night.

"Yes. I closed up for good today."

"You don't mean to say you've given up?" exclaimed Tony. "When you had such a fine trade."

"Yes," Virginia admitted without a sigh. "I really never intended to have a stand."

"Didn't you like it? Wasn't it fun, besides giving you some real money?" Ted asked in wonderment.

"Well, you see," stumbled Virginia, apparently ashamed to admit her vanity, "I only came down for a little vacation. I have to go back home soon."

"Oh," said Tony. Just like that.

The silence that followed wasn't golden; if anything metallic it must have been cast

iron, for the two girls from the green stand never could understand such indifference on Virginia's part.

"But what do you do all day? That is," Tony corrected herself, "what *will* you do all day now?"

"Oh, I love to read," Virginia said, patting the movie magazine that lay on her lap. "Don't you?"

"Some," said Tony crisply. "But not while out doors is good. I read in blizzards and times when I can't get out. But listen, Virginia. We're going to have a little tea party at our stand tomorrow, from two until four, before and after the rush. We'd like to have you come and deal out the cookies."

"Oh thanks. I guess I can come. If I get through my packing in time. I'm going home the morning after. I've had a lovely time since I met you girls," she seemed bound to add. "Wish I had known you sooner."

"And *we* had a good time too," Ted put in politely. "Your old gray goose ghost was the best fun we've had in a long time. But I do hope you can come over to our little tea tomorrow."

"I'll try. I have to pick some fresh beans for an old man who comes once a week. He wants the fresh eggs and vegetables if we

have any. He's such a jolly old fellow; we call him Jolly Bill," Virginia explained, "and I'd hate to disappoint him."

"Jolly Bill what?" asked Tony, just because the name Bill meant something to her.

"His name is Bill Ryan——"

"Bill Ryan?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Can he be *my* Bill Ryan?"

"*Your* Bill Ryan?"

"Yes. Looks like a jockey, acts like one, loves horses, loves my old Major. And he has soft blue eyes——"

Virginia's laugh spoiled the eulogy. Even Ted joined in, but Tony was serious.

"You don't know what it means to get trace of old Bill Ryan, if he's my Bill. Please tell me, Virginia," she pleaded, and anyone could see she was in real earnest.

"Well, he is like a jockey," Virginia began. "He drives a car for a lady that lived once at the health camp——"

"That's Bill!" fairly shouted Tony. "Oh, I'm so glad, when will he come, did you say, Virgie?"

"He's due tomorrow. But that doesn't say he'll surely come."

"Bill will come when he's due."

"Trying to joke about bills being due?" cut

in Ted. "Now Tony, just keep cool. It's hot enough without going into fits and boiling over. Virgie will give a message to Bill."

"Oh no, that wouldn't do. I'd have to see him myself. No, of course, I couldn't," demurred Tony. "I'd have to ask him to come over to see me, I suppose."

"What makes you so anxious about this old chap?" Ted asked, wondering at Tony's sudden interest. Tony had only told her she knew Lady Jess had had this old driver. She had never mentioned to Ted anything about Bill's visit to Major's stall, and the startling facts he had disclosed there.

"I'd just like to hear about our Lady Jess," Tony now answered Ted, drawing in from the sudden enthusiasm, that must have made Ted feel there was a lot more than that behind the outburst. "Wouldn't *you* like to hear how she is?"

"Not as much as all that," Ted replied quizzically. Then as if suspecting Tony's motive, she passed the matter off, and Tony agreed with Virginia that the only way to get in touch with old Bill, was to have him leave his address at her grandfather's when he came—if he came—for the fresh eggs and newly picked vegetables.

On their way back,—they were walking to-

day—Tony kept as much as possible to the subject of Virginia and her peculiarities, in order to avoid talking about old Bill. Tony felt just a bit queer about deceiving Ted, they had been so confidential even about the Lady Jess; but remembering Mattie's warning, not to talk to strangers about Tom's personal and private affairs, she felt obliged to avoid the subject uppermost in her mind.

"I wonder what has become of Bumps?" she remarked finally. "We haven't seen him in the longest time."

"No, we haven't," Ted replied. "And I've been wondering too, what has become of him. But look! There's Mattie coming to meet us," she exclaimed suddenly, for there indeed, was Mattie coming to meet them. "And she seems excited."

Tony instantly broke into a run toward the approaching figure. There must have been something the matter for Mattie to be out that way.

"What is it, Mattie?" Tony called on ahead.

"Have you seen Major? He must have got out of the pasture. He doesn't seem to be around——"

"He couldn't get out," Tony declared. "I hooked the big gate myself. And he never wants to get out. Have you looked over

by the birches?" she exclaimed, instantly alarmed.

"Well, he must be around some place," Mattie tried to assure Tony, who was naturally worried about the safety of her old horse. "Don't get excited——"

"Oh, please don't tell me that, Mattie," Tony rejoined. "Everybody seems to think I get excited. How long is he gone?"

Ted and all hands went at once to look for old Major, but he was gone—the gate was opened and there was no doubt about it, he could not have opened it. Neither was there any doubt that he was gone.

"Oh, dear me!" sighed Tony, in real distress now that her old friend could not be found. "Who could have taken him? Are there gypsies over on the back road to Tideway? Do you think they would take my old Major?"

"No, I don't," Ted answered so promptly she must have brought courage to Tony. "No, Tony, the gypsies wouldn't dare take a horse, or anything else, for that matter. They know better."

"It certainly is curious," Mattie admitted, "and I've been around all afternoon. I don't see how he could have gone out without my hearing him. Let's look over in the corn-

field. He might get in there," she suggested, as a last resort.

There was little hope in that direction, but all three went across the road to the big cornfield.

"Not a hoofmark anywhere," poor Tony said, as her spirits sank lower and lower. "I just tell you, whoever took my horse will pay for it. I'll bet Dad will let a thief know what it means to steal a poor old horse."

"But maybe someone just borrowed him," Ted suggested hopefully. "He may not be stolen at all."

"People don't borrow by walking off with the goods," Tony cut in. She was getting more angry as their search seemed really fruitless, and there was evidently no telling what dire punishment she expected to visit upon the head of Major's abductor—when such a person would be found.

CHAPTER XXII

WHERE THERE'S A WILL

It was Ted who discovered the first clue. She knew more people than Tony did, and she didn't mind shouting in Major's cause. They had searched the corn-field with no better results than unearthing and scaring a nest of rabbits and a nest of field mice; certainly there was no trace of the much wanted Major there.

Tony would have cried if she had dared. But to cry, even for her beloved old horse, seemed too babyish, so she just sniffled, and pouted and got good and mad at the unknown culprit.

Some boys were coming down the wide, dusty road and Ted hailed them.

"Hey!" she shouted lustily. "Seen anything of our horse?"

"Yep," came the prompt answer. "Felix got him!"

"Felix! That's Bumps!" exclaimed Tony, then she shouted: "Where is he?"

"Saw him going over by the inlet," came the

boys' answer. They were on their way for a swim, one could easily see that, and they were in a hurry and did not at all like being detained.

"Wait a minute!" Ted commanded. "When did you see him? And which way was he going?"

" 'Bout three o'clock an' he was ridin' horseback."

"Which way?"

"Goin' over by Piney Woods." And that was positively all those boys could tell, whether they knew or not. They were going swimming and it was getting late. So they went.

"Now, that's all right," Mattie began at once. "You needn't worry about that boy having him. He'll bring him back all right——"

"You bet he will, and quick too," snapped Tony. "What right has he to take our horse? I wish Dad was around. I'd get right in his side car and maybe——"

"But you wouldn't do anything to Bumps!" Ted exclaimed in surprise. "He probably just needed a horse in a hurry, and maybe didn't have time to ask."

"Well, of course," Tony cooled down, "I wouldn't have Bumps arrested. But I'd just

like to know why he should take Major, all the same. Is it far to Piney Woods?"

"Oh, goody!" yelled Ted. "Here comes Sid Rowland. He'll take us over. Isn't that luck!"

The green roadster really was coming along. Sid was glad to take them, at least he said he was, and it was only a few minutes later, that Ted and Tony were in the car, skimming over the long white road that crossed bridges, went in and out woodlands, made straight to farm house driveways, and then cut a long slash in the meadow land that led into a pine grove called Piney Woods.

The searchers were, of course, looking right and left all along the way, but not a sign of Bumps or Major could they spy.

"There's a little camp over here," Sid told the girls. "I saw an auto come out of that lane the other night."

"Let's try it. Bumps always finds jobs around camps," Tony recalled.

Sid steered his car in the lane that turned off the main road. It was almost dusk, being a cloudy day and long threatening shadows crossed their way as Sid carefully guided his car in the little lane.

"I hear someone talking," Ted said suddenly, in a hushed voice. "Don't you?"

"Yes. Over that way," Tony pointed out.

"We'll leave the car here," Sid suggested. "We can walk better than ride over this dump."

Then they followed the sound of the voices. The woods were not deep, nor the trees high, for pines along the ocean are mostly of scrub variety, and not strong nor heavily needled. So it was not hard to trace the voices, for already a blade of light showed where, evidently, a camp was pitched.

"There he is!" Tony almost whispered. "There's Major!"

They were beside a tent now and here Major stood meekly by, flicking his tail as Tony neared him. But the voices had ceased. Whoever was within the tent was now quiet probably hearing them approach.

Sid went straight to the closed flap around which a little rim of light framed the doorway. The girls hung back: Tony patting Major, and Ted watching anxiously.

Then the tent flap was raised—by old Bill Ryan!

"What is it, please?" he demanded, apparently resenting the intrusion.

"Oh, hello Bill!" called out Tony gladly, running toward the tent. "We came after Major——"

"Hush, Miss, please," he interrupted, coming out of the tent and closing the flap carefully. "Come over this way."

"Someone sick?" Sid asked.

"Yes, she's sick," Bill answered in hushed tones. "That was why we needed the horse."

He led them down the little lane to a safe distance from the tent. Tony even left Major behind her, so anxious was she about the person who was sick behind that canvas flap.

"It's Jessie?" she asked.

"Yes. And our car got stuck down in the meadow. Felix brought your horse to tow us out. But Miss Jessie isn't able to go to the hotel tonight. She hates the noise so. I always told her she'd get her death in these crazy camps," Bill complained.

"Oh, listen!" exclaimed Tony, grasping Ted's arm in her excitement. "I wonder if we couldn't bring her up to our house? We have a lovely big spare room."

"Ask him," Ted suggested. For she needed no more words than had already been spoken, to assure her that Tony's Aunt Jessie was the sick person they were talking about.

"She was all right and we were going back to the city today," Bill explained. "She sent her maid up on an early train, and our little travelling car was all ready for the home trip.

Then Miss Jessie wanted another ocean bath. When she came back she had one of her nervous spells——" Bill stopped and what he didn't say was easily understood.

"But she can't stay in the tent tonight," Tony put in eagerly.

"No. When she gets a bit better we'll go over to the hotel. But she hates the noise there. That's why she always insisted upon a tent in the woods. You see," he tried to explain without delay or wasting words, "she got these nervous spells when her voice broke down. And she's believed every doctor she consulted, that her strength would come back by living out doors." Again Bill inserted that impressive silence that plainly told how he disagreed with the doctors. Bill was not a man to make long speeches.

Bumps was astride Major now and came riding up the lane, quietly and confidently, as if he had been the hero he probably supposed himself to be, instead of having been considered something quite the opposite.

"All right; thanks Felix," Bill hailed him as he passed. "See you in the morning, if we're still here."

"Sure," grunted Bumps, patting Major in a way that made Tony a little jealous.

"Don't give him anything to eat," she felt

obliged to order, just to show that she was the boss of the big brown horse, that had pulled a house car safely out of the soft, marshy meadows.

It was too much to expect that old Bill would readily agree with Tony, that Miss Jessie might be induced to go over to the Potter home for a short stay, or even for one night. But the chance to bring her where Tom Potter would again see her, as the girl he once loved, was too much for Tony to give up, at least without a struggle.

"Well, I'll see," Bill finally agreed.

"And I'll run the girls over in my car and get Tony's aunt," Sid arranged so quickly no one had a chance to offer opposition.

"All right. But be careful," warned Bill. "She's notional, and don't be disappointed if she won't go. I'll have the car out here before I propose it to her. She's well enough in every way except for nerves," he tried to make clear. "She talks as well and walks as well as we do, but those pesky nerves——"

It was surprising how easily Mattie was won over to the plan. Perhaps she had been expecting Tony to bring her the news of her story's end, ever since Tony had told her that night in her room, that she would never rest until she had done so.

That, and Mattie's natural interest in Tom's happiness, were enough to incite her to prompt action. And when Ted went back to her stand, where she knew Mrs. Cutting would be talking herself and helpless customers to death, then Mattie and Tony got in Sid's car, and Sid being the best natured boy in the world, just drove them back to Piney Woods again.

Tony could scarcely speak now, she was so excited. It was one thing to make a wild plan like this, but quite another to work it out successfully.

"Do you suppose, Mattie," she asked timidly when they were almost up to the woodsy lane, "that she will be angry with me for doing this?"

"Angry! Why should she? She doesn't have to come with us if she doesn't want to. We'll merely invite her. But I can't——be sure about Tom——"

"I can. Don't worry about Tom. I know him!" Tony insisted lightly, but her assurance was very real.

"Atta girl!" chirped Sid, who knew just enough about the whole thing to know "it was great." He wasn't like a girl and didn't ask endless questions.

"Are you sure, Sid," Tony asked, trying to

be politely considerate, "that we are not interfering with any of your plans?"

"You are, but I'm glad of it. So don't let that bother you. Here we are. And there's old Bill's car. Isn't that some rig!"

"It was fitted up for living in it, as my aunt traveled along," Tony replied, and as she said "my aunt," her failing courage took a leap forward. Why should her own aunt not understand why and how she, Tony Potter, had dared to do all this?

Actually approaching the waiting car, which was standing at the side of the tent with headlights dimmed, all three, Tony, Mattie and Sid, sort of held their breath. The meeting of Mattie and Jessie—how would that happen? It was a strange thing to force them together in this way.

But a call of the musical well known voice, from the canvas rigged car, left little time for such speculation.

"Hello there!" called out Lady Jess, now definitely known as Jessie Weaver. "Tony Potter! Didn't I know you would do this?" Pleasure went out with the words. "And don't tell me you have my old friend Mattie there——"

"That's exactly who is here," Mattie called back, her voice full of welcoming gladness

for which Tony's palpitating heart sent out glad little beats. "We came over to kidnap you," Mattie went on, for Sid's car was now alongside the other. "It—was the only way we ever could get you to come to see us, I guess."

"Now, you needn't climb out," Bill was trying to warn without ordering. .For Jessie was moving in that direction, and he wanted her to be a little careful.

"Bill, I'm as fit as a fiddle," Jessie cut in, but in spite of her mirth there showed the tinge of nervous excitement in her manner.

"But we can just as well get in your car," Tony suggested now. She hadn't even tried to speak before.

"Certainly you can. This car is built for company. Do come along. Mattie, let me get a look at you! And our little Tony! I've known her all summer, but I tried to hide——"

"Now please, Miss Jessie," again cautioned Bill. "If you'll just wait a minute, I'll have them both in here in a jiffy. Then you can talk without your head ache."

And at that, old Bill Ryan knew exactly what he was talking about.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE BIG PARTY

THERE was no use trying to deny it, Tony was shaking in her boots. To think that she had dared to do this! To actually break in upon the secret hiding place of Jessie Weaver and bring Mattie Potter along with her!

But like all big things, this had seemed bigger at a distance. Now, with Jessie squeezing Mattie's arm, and Mattie declaring Jessie was just as big a flatter-box as ever (telling Mattie she hadn't changed and all that); Tony sat in her corner of the big car and listened in real, girlish awe.

Two women could be, after all, just as crazy as two girls; when they got going, and certainly Mattie and Jessie had "got going."

Sid's car, with the obliging Sid, had sped away some minutes ago, and it seemed to Tony she might almost as well have gone along with him, for all the importance those two girls (Mattie and Jessie were calling

themselves girls) seemed to consider her, if they considered her at all.

But that was just the way Tony wanted it to work out. For, if Mattie and Jessie made up this way, there surely could be no trouble about Tom.

"Go along, Bill," ordered Jessie. "I guess I'll have to let myself get kidnapped. It will be a new experience and a delightful one, I'm sure. You can come back and attend to things here," she further ordered Bill. "I'll do whatever these darlings want me to do ——" She did take Tony's hand now and she was squeezing it lovingly, and that big back seat, upon which all three were sitting, wasn't even crowded, for as Jessie had said, her car was built for company.

"You were not going to run away from us again without even seeing us," Mattie charged Jessie, by way of further offering welcome. "Tony has been hinting about her mystery, and about a lady——"

"Oh, I knew I would never escape this little witch once she made sure just who I was," Jessie replied happily, and "the witch" chuckled in agreement. "I did hope to spring my surprise soon. You see, I was determined to get strong before I——" She hesitated.

She meant, of course, she had been determined to get strong before she met Tom again. But it was Tony who saved her from further embarrassment.

"We'll get you strong a lot quicker than you could manage it all alone," she cut in. "Since this is the air that agrees with you, and we live here——"

"Little witch again!" exclaimed Jessie. "But tell me, Mattie," she lowered her voice, and the car stumbling over a bump gave them all a little start, "does Tom know?" She asked this seriously.

"Tom will be all right," quickly Tony assured her. "Don't you worry about him. I know—I know he always kept your cedar and rosebuds——"

"Tony!" Both Mattie and Jessie exclaimed as one voice.

"Well, I did," Tony went on, hiding her own embarrassment in the real emergency she was struggling with. "And I know—a lot more—too."

Mattie had pinched Tony's knee until the girl felt it best to desist, because that was Mattie's way. Of herself, Tony would have assured Jessie that Tom always had loved her. She believed the best way to meet a troublesome situation is fairly and squarely.

But, of course, these ladies were not girls of today, like Ted and Tony.

"Perhaps I won't have to see him——" Jessie began in that same small voice.

"Now, let me say something, Jessie," Mattie began. "You are my old friend, as well as Tom's, and why shouldn't you pay *us* a little visit?"

"But you don't know what it means——" Jessie caught her breath nervously, and then called out to Bill, who was separated from them by the limousine glass. "Stop at the drug store first, I need a few little things. You see," she explained to Tony and Mattie, "I sent most all my things up to the city with Cecilia this morning."

Getting her things at the drug store provided a welcome break in their tense conversation. Each one of them was having her own anxieties over the question of how Tom would take it. No one could blame Jessie for a wildly beating heart, as she now found herself about to meet the lover she had been secretly watching all summer, as he sped over the roads on his motor-cycle. As for Mattie—she wondered and wondered. Certainly there was no danger of Tom's acting anything other than the perfect gentleman she knew her brother to be. But how would it af-

fect him? Would he marry and settle down at last, and give up those crazy airship notions? Mattie was taking some risk in bringing Jessie without giving Tom any warning, but if there was fault in that she felt inclined to lay it to Tony's impulsiveness, and that would be easily forgiven.

But what about Tony's state of mind?

"Oh, what will he say?" she kept asking herself. "Will he rush up to her and kiss her?" She didn't think he would, but she hoped he would. Tony didn't want to be cheated out of any of the thrilling drama she had been so long picturing for herself, and if Tom should just be matter of fact, that would be disappointing.

"He couldn't be. Wait until he sees her. She's so sweet. Just wait! Oh, how I wish we could have Ted hiding some place——" But, of course, lovers would have to be left to themselves. Very likely she herself would only get little snatches of their surprise meeting, for Mattie was sure to fix things so that no one, not even Tony, would be there to spoil it for them.

When Bill returned with the little white package from the drug store, and when Jessie realized she was actually being driven right up to Tom Potter's door, she fell back in her

corner, clasped and unclasped her white hands nervously, and tried vainly to keep the emotion she was going through from showing in her beautiful, fair face.

Tony could see her long lashes lying on her cheeks, she could not help but see how her dark eyes blinked in spite of every effort Jessie could make to hold them firm, and brave. And Tony could easily sense how fast that heart was beating, the heart that must have suffered so long and so silently in separation from the man, that even Tony knew to be a priceless companion.

"Feel all right, Jessie?" Mattie asked apprehensively.

"Yes. I feel like——running away——"

"I'm the one who ought to run away," Tony reminded her, trying to lighten the situation. "If anyone is to blame for this surprise party I'm the one," she ended merrily.

Bill had drawn his car carefully to the steps under the old porte cochére, and now he stepped out with as much pomp and ceremony as any liveried footman might have shown.

But as he opened the door for his mistress, he said cautiously:

"Take it easy, Miss Jessie. You're doing fine but——go——slow."

"All right, Bill," Jessie replied, with forced cheerfulness. "Bill's my bodyguard. I don't know what—I would do——"

He had her bag in his hand; Mattie was up the steps first; and now Tony was bringing Jessie up, her hand under the arm that was rather frantically clutching at her own.

"Go slowly, please dear," she urged. "I'm a little wobbly."

Tony could well imagine what that remark meant, and she held the fluttering hand as steadily as she could. Mattie was now inside the door and she surely was exclaiming about something. What was it?

Could it be—— Was he home!

Then Tony almost wobbled herself, for the dark shadow that filled the doorway was——

"Tom!" exclaimed Jessie in a jerky little sigh, as she suddenly leaned full weight against the bewildered Tony.

"Oh, Daddy, quick!" begged Tony. "Catch her!"

And the next moment Jessie Weaver was in her lover's arms at last.

* * * * * * *

It was too much for Tony. After all her visions of what might happen in this great moment, no sooner had she seen Tom's face

full of loving sympathy for the frail woman he so gently led to rest upon Mattie's commodious couch, no sooner had she seen her Aunt Jessie give in to that protection with a sigh of relief, that told a story more fully than words could have done, no sooner had the plucky little Tony witnessed the completion of her daring undertaking, than she left the grown-ups to their own ways, and dashed down to the barn to confide in Major.

"Oh, Major-boy," she began, breathlessly, "we did it; you and I and Ted. If you hadn't come to me with this old place it never would have happened. And if you hadn't been here for Bumps to steal they wouldn't have sent after you and I wouldn't have gone to trace you. And that was what brought it all about."

Major flipped his tail, winked his left eye and wiggled his right ear in perfect understanding. Then he gave three loud stamps.

"Yes, and you are going to have oats, real oats tonight, a whole measure full," Tony assured him, getting ready at once to fulfil her promise.

She got the measure of oats and spilled them cheerily into the wooden bin.

"There Major-boy," she went on. "Oats, nice golden crispy oats. Eat your fill but don't make yourself sick. You're a good old

darling shiny horse," and she patted the shiny neck as Major began to munch.

Standing there a moment, her heart still wildly fluttering, Tony was also giving full credit to Ted, her chum, for all that she too had done to bring about the happy reunion.

"Ted is quietly brave," she was thinking, "and she gave me courage without giving me preaching. I've learned an awful lot from Ted, and I'm going over this minute to tell her what has happened."

But Tony didn't go over that minute, for big Tom Potter was calling her from the back door, yes, and, he was coming down the path to get her now, for he well knew why she had made that prompt and sudden escape.

"Come along, Puss," he ordered lovingly. "This is your party as well as mine, and I want you to share it. How do you like your Aunt Jessie?" he asked then, playfully pinioning her young arm in his strong official grasp, as he led her back to the house where the happy Jessie waited for them.

Her Daddy-Tom was happy. Even his always pleasant face seemed really lighted up now, like a star with light behind it.

Men are queer, Tony barely had time to realize. They seem perfectly happy until they become happier. And then you can tell

they really were not quite happy before. Girls and women may tell folks how they feel, but real men, like Tom Potter, are always hard to understand. Being brave means just that; being brave is everything.

He led her into the old homestead where she found her Aunt Jessie beaming. Mattie had insisted upon making an invalid of her, although Jessie now declared there could never have been anything, except plain ordinary loneliness, the matter with her.

Of course it was hard for her to keep tears back, tears of that sudden happiness that comes with such a complete release from long suffering heartaches. But she too was being brave.

"To think," she would begin, "that you have all been here in this dear old homestead, while I——"

"Now Jessie," Tom would wisely interrupt, "we are to have no more regrets. From now on we are going to try to make up for lost time." And the blue in his eyes would actually glitter, Tony thought, as she, in sheer admiration of how it had all worked out, seemed speechless, if not quite dumb.

They all praised her, of course, but she declared she hadn't done a thing but follow perfectly obvious "leads," that anyone on

earth would have followed and that she had had a lot of fun doing it.

But how happy they all were! Surely Jessie would grow strong in that atmosphere. And when Tony was helping Mattie with the simple supper that was to be the first of many they were to have together, she tried to tell Tony that it had been just as she and Tony suspected.

"Jessie lost her health in studying singing abroad," she hurriedly explained, "and she was too proud to come back to Tom until she felt strong enough to be the woman she had always hoped to be. She went from one health fad to another, living out of doors practically all the time, and, of course, she knew we were down here when she came this summer."

"What will they do now?" whispered Tony, for the voices in the living room were not loud enough to cover her own should she have spoken outright.

"Tom has that lovely white colonial house in view——"

"Oh, goody," squealed Tony, for she knew what that meant.

And after supper Tom would insist upon bringing Ted over to join the reunion.

"She's Tony's inseparable chum," he ex-

plained, "and we hope they will both go to college together. Certainly they have had a fine time this summer, and they haven't wasted their time either."

But *everything* was fine with Tom now, and that was all Tony asked, except that she and Ted both be allowed to talk themselves to death about the wedding—coming—the new home, and then when High School days would be successfully finished, that college days might come.

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